

This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

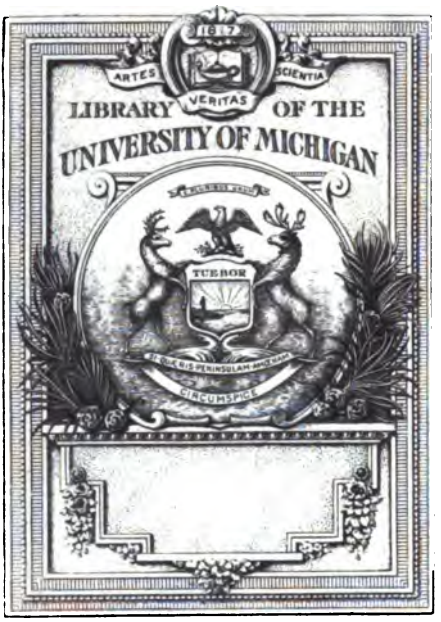
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`




ARTES
VERITAS
SCIENTIA
LIBRARY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
TUEBOR
SI QUAERIS PENINSULAM AMOENAM
CIRCUMSPICE









THE HEEL OF ACHILLES



THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK · BOSTON · CHICAGO
DALLAS · ATLANTA · SAN FRANCISCO

MACMILLAN & CO., LIMITED
LONDON · BOMBAY · CALCUTTA
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.
TORONTO

THE HEEL OF ACHILLES

BY

E. M. DELAFIELD

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1921

All rights reserved

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

COPYRIGHT, 1921,
BY THE MACMILLAN COMPANY.

Set up and printed. Published June, 1921.

Press of
J. J. Little & Ives Company
New York, U. S. A.

To YOÉ: my sister, and always
my greatest friend.

"Provinces twain o'er the land held sway, and the country was ruled by twain,
I made the laws, as King, but you, as Premier, revoked them again.
You were my faithful A.D.C., when I was the Captain bold,
But Watson I, to your Sherlock Holmes, in the Baker Street days of old.
We went through times that were strange and bad, and we shared and shared the same,
And talked and dreamed and planned of the day when we'd come to freedom and fame.
And the dreams came true, and the times were changed, and we did the things we'd planned—
(Don't you remember the two Fur Coats, and the trips to Weston sand?)—
So now you work at a real Career, and I'm writing, in Singapore,
And send my book to my Twin—a token of all that has gone before.
A sign of the past—but a symbol, too, that is known to you and me,
Of the days together still to come, and the best that is yet to be."



Librarian
Wahr
8.3.25
12190

THE HEEL OF ACHILLES

I

"I AM an orphan," reflected Lydia Raymond, with immense satisfaction.

She was a very intelligent little girl of twelve years old, and she remembered very well that when her father had died out in China, three years ago, it was her mother who had been the centre of attention and compassion. People had spoken about her poor dead father, and had praised him and pitied him, but their real attention had all been for the widow, who was there under their eyes, pathetic and sorrow-stricken. Lydia herself had been "poor little thing," but Grandpapa and her aunts and uncle had all told her that it was her mother who must be thought of now, and she knew that they kept on saying to one another that "the child will be a comfort to poor Mary." Her own individuality, which she felt so strongly, did not seem to count at all, and Lydia had, quite silently, resented that intensely, ever since she could remember anything at all.

Once her mother had read her some extracts of old letters from her dead father, letters which had once come so regularly every week in thin blue envelopes with the Hong Kong postmark.

"Kiss our baby Lydia for me. I hope she is a good little thing always . . . some day, when these years of

hard work are over, you won't have to sacrifice yourself any more, my poor Mary. . . ." And, later on, in the last letter of all: "The child's life is only a continuation of ours, my Mary."

Long afterwards, Lydia, who never forgot the words, came to see them as the expression of man's eternal wistful attempt to live on in the generation supplanting his own, but when her mother read them aloud to her, in a voice choked with tears, something in Lydia revolted violently.

"My life is my own," she thought stubbornly, "not just a continuation of somebody else's."

With that acute clarity of vision that enabled her to analyze certain aspects of her childhood's world with such astonishing maturity, she once told herself:

"They don't love me for myself at all. Grandpapa doesn't love me the least bit—he doesn't love anybody. And mother loves me because I'm *her* child, and the aunts love me because I'm father's child, and they think I'm a comfort to mother."

She could hardly remember her father, and though at first she had shed tears over his death, Lydia had quickly dried them.

"Now, dear, you must be a good little girl and not cry and make poor mother more unhappy than she is already," had said harassed-looking Aunt Evelyn. "You know you must think of her now. You'll have to be her comfort."

And almost immediately afterwards Aunt Evelyn had said to Lydia's mother:

"Do, do give way and cry, dearie. It will be so much better for you. I know you're wonderful, but you'll suffer for it later on. You're bound to."

After that it had not needed Aunt Evelyn's further

observation that "poor little Lydia didn't know what her loss meant" to dry Lydia's perfunctory tears with the sting of an inflexible pride.

She would not cry again until they were prepared to concede to her the major right to affliction!

She did not love her mother very much. It is more common than is generally allowed, for an intelligent child, still in bondage to her natural instinct, reinforced by the tradition of allegiance to natural authorities, to couple that allegiance with a perfectly distinct antipathy to the personality of either or both parents. Lydia's dislike of her mother's sentimentality, her constant vacillation of purpose, and her incessant garrulity, was only unchildlike in her calm analysis of it, and in the conscious restraint that she put upon it.

Mrs. Raymond had often said, sometimes in Lydia's hearing, that she would welcome death.

"But for little Lydia, I think I should have put an end to it all long ago. But how can I leave her, when she only has me?"

Mrs. Raymond, however, without any intervention of her own, when Lydia was twelve years old, reached the haven to which, since her husband's death, she had so often aspired.

"I am an orphan."

Lydia, already a dignified and self-contained little girl, bore herself with a new, pale composure.

It was for her that Aunt Evelyn, once more summoned from her shabby, untidy house at Wimbledon, was now hastily ordering mourning, and to whom the Wimbledon cousins had written brief, blotted letters of compassion and sympathy, and it was her future that Aunt Evelyn and Uncle George and Aunt Beryl

had all been discussing under their breath whenever they thought she was not listening.

This, at least, was Lydia's complacent conviction, until she overheard a few chance words about Grandpapa, and how best they could break it to him, when he was old, and his heart was weak—and he had, besides, never really got over the shock of poor Peter's death, three years ago.

So it was Grandpapa they were thinking of now!

Lydia really felt very angry. Grandpapa, however, did not exact an undue amount of attention, on the whole.

"Grandpapa is old," said Aunt Beryl, with a hint of apology in her voice. "Very old people don't realize things quite in the same way—they're more familiar with grief, perhaps."

"The real blow was poor Peter's death," said Aunt Evelyn, also determined that Grandpapa should be accredited with his due meed of afflictions.

Aunt Beryl, who lived with Grandpapa, took Lydia to stay with them.

They had a house at the seaside, only two hours by train from London, and Aunt Evelyn came with them, ostensibly to see how Grandpapa was, but in reality, Lydia felt certain, in order to help them to decide upon her own future.

The two aunts talked to one another in anxious undertones all through the journey; their two, almost identical, black hats nodding so close together that Aunt Beryl's hard straw brim kept on knocking against Aunt Evelyn's stiff, upstanding bow of rigid crape. Although the younger one was still unmarried, Lydia's two aunts had never lost a certain indefinable similarity

of taste that always made them look as though they were dressed alike.

Aunt Evelyn was Mrs. Senthoven.

"You can remember it because of Beethoven," she always said, with a nervous laugh. She had three children, and was several years older than her sister.

Miss Raymond might have been handsome in a small, beaky way but for her extreme thinness and the permanent anxiety in her light-brown eyes. "Beryl is the youngest bird in the old home nest, and is always with dear Grandpapa," Aunt Evelyn and Uncle George were apt to say.

The youngest bird in the old home nest, growing yearly more pinched and vulture-like, invariably acquiesced eagerly in the pious formula, and thus enabled Aunt Evelyn to give her undivided attention to the straitened, clamorous household at Wimbledon, and Uncle George to leave his room in Grandpapa's house untenanted during his fortnightly holiday from the office.

Now, however, he was at home, having gone straight back after the funeral. He met them at the station.

Uncle George was small and fair, with a habit of asking thoughtful questions of the kind apt to provoke hasty and inaccurate replies, which he then had the satisfaction of correcting.

He said, "Well, well, Lydia," and gave her a little, awkward pat on the shoulder, that she quite understood to be expressive of his pity and sympathy.

"What about the 'bus?" said Aunt Beryl.

"No, no," Aunt Evelyn protested quickly. "The walk would do us good. No need to take the 'bus."

This was one of the fundamental differences between the aunts and Lydia's mother. Mrs. Raymond had

always taken a cab from the station, whether she had brought any luggage or no, when she came down to see Grandpapa. She had never seemed to be aware, as Lydia had privately always been aware, that the household in Regency Terrace thought very much the worse of her for the extravagance.

"The 'bus could take your bag, Evelyn. I know the man," said Uncle George. "It will be quite all right." He put out his hand for the small, dirty, brown suit-case that was weighing his sister down on one side.

"Well—I don't know," she hesitated. "I suppose it will be sixpence or more saved, if we carry it ourselves." She laughed nervously.

"Better let the 'bus take it. I can say a word to the conductor," persisted Uncle George, now burdened with the bag.

"Oh, it isn't far. I think I'd rather keep an eye on it."

"Just as you like."

Uncle George raised his eyebrows, and they trudged away down the dusty station road.

Lydia was tired and hot in her new, fussy black clothes, and the contrast between her present discomfort and those condemned, self-indulgent ways of her mother, in the advantages of which she had always shared, brought a genuine realization of loss to her mind with a dull pang.

"What made your train late?" Uncle George inquired, patiently shifting the suit-case into his other hand.

"Was it late?"

"Surely. Wasn't it, Beryl?"

"I think it *was*. About five or ten minutes."

Her brother immediately looked astonished.

"Five *or* ten! The railway company would tell you that there is a very great difference. As a matter of fact, your train came in exactly seven-and-a-half minutes behind time."

"Perhaps we started late," wearily suggested Mrs. Senthoven. She was beginning to limp a little in her tight, black boots.

"Not very likely to do that. Probably you lost time at the Junction. The two-fifteen always has to wait about there. I've noticed it."

"Probably that was it," said Aunt Beryl, with tired acquiescence in the masculine infallibility on the subject of time-tables.

"I expect it was that. Let me see—you would have stopped only once before the Junction——"

The discussion, if it could be called one, when the only wish of the aunts was obviously to agree with Uncle George, lasted all the way to Regency Terrace.

Then Aunt Evelyn and Aunt Beryl both said, "Here we are!" and Uncle George put the suit-case down upon the lowest step of the stone flight that led to the front door as though by no possible feat of endurance could he have sustained its weight further.

"There's Grandpapa," said Mrs. Senthoven, looking up at a first-floor window, and nodding vigorously.

"George!" exclaimed Aunt Beryl reproachfully, "why is Grandpapa in the drawing-room? You know he always sits in the dining-room on week-days. With the parrot to keep him company and all."

Her brother was spared the necessity of providing any explanation as to Grandpapa's disregard of his privileges by the opening of the front door.

"Welcome, my dear child," said Aunt Beryl very kindly to Lydia, and she kissed her.

Then she looked round sharply at the servant who had opened the door. Her face relaxed at the immaculate cap and apron that met her gaze, and she said graciously:

"Good afternoon, Gertrude."

As they went into the dining-room, of which the door already stood open, Lydia heard Aunt Beryl say in tones of satisfaction:

"The girl really is improving at last. I've had such a time with her!"

"I wish I could get our girl at home to look half so smart," said Aunt Evelyn, shaking her head. "But she's got more than she can manage, with the house in the morning, and then the waiting at meals—Robert absolutely insists on that—and half her time she doesn't dress in the afternoons at all, and I really can't blame her. Just goes to the door with her arms all turned up, anyhow. Not that we have many callers," sighed Aunt Evelyn. "I've had to give over social life altogether, practically; the children take such a lot of seeing to. Don't ever marry a poor man, Beryl."

The fiction still prevailed between the sisters that a choice of matrimonial projects lay ever before Miss Raymond.

"If you ladies have finished talking secrets——" said Uncle George, in reproachful reference to the rapid undertones employed by Lydia's aunts.

"Yes, now what about Grandpapa?"

"He'll want to see our little Lydia."

"Poor child! Get her a little wine and a biscuit first, George."

Lydia sat complacently at the square dining-room table, whilst Uncle George slowly unlocked the lower half of the sideboard and brought out a decanter with

a very little red liquid in it, and Aunt Beryl produced, also from a locked receptacle, a small glass barrel containing three or four Albert biscuits.

"You sit here quietly, dear. Aunt Evelyn and I will go up to Grandpapa first."

The aunts left the room together, and Lydia and Uncle George remained solemnly facing one another across the dining-room table. Lydia was much too self-possessed a little girl ever to feel any necessity for making conversation, and as her uncle remained silent, she occupied herself in gazing round the dining-room, familiar though it was to her already. The table was still covered with rather worn red baize; Grandpapa's arm-chair, in which Grandpapa should by rights have been sitting now, still stood in the bay window, flanked by the small, round table which supported the parrot's cage. The cage was covered with an old piece of green stuff now, and Lydia was glad of it. She was not at all fond of the parrot. Over the mantelpiece hung "The Monarch of the Glen," and over the writing-table, at which no one ever wrote, but where Aunt Beryl did a good deal of sewing, was "Derby Day." Lydia had heard Aunt Evelyn say that the detail in that picture always struck her as being quite wonderful.

The sideboard was the largest piece of furniture in the room, and it occupied almost the whole of one end of it. Lydia had often been told the story of the sideboard's arrival at Regency Terrace—the impossibility of getting it in at the front door—Uncle George's humorous suggestion that the roof of the house should be taken off—and finally its lengthy and strenuous entrance through a window, assisted by a large crane. It was a matter of everlasting regret to Lydia that

this sensational progress should have taken place some twenty years before her own arrival into the world. In front of the empty grate stood a faded worked screen, its spiral legs embedded in the fluffy black hearth-rug.

"Oh," said Lydia, suddenly reminded, "where is Shamrock?"

"Out, I suppose," said Uncle George simply. Shamrock was Grandpapa's dog, and Uncle George had good reason to disclaim all responsibility for Shamrock's in-comings and out-goings.

"A seaside town, or, in fact, any town, is no place for a dog, in my opinion," said Uncle George.

"Of course they have more fun in the country," glibly returned his niece, who had never spent more than three consecutive days in the country anywhere, nor owned a dog in her life. "They can run after chickens and lambs, I suppose," she added innocently.

"They can indeed!" ejaculated Uncle George. "But why lambs, Lydia?"

"I thought I'd seen pictures of dogs running after sheep, and barking at them to make them go the right way."

"Sheep-dog! That's another matter. Sheep are not lambs, child—nor is this the season for lambs."

Uncle George looked happier, having found an opportunity for the bestowal of information.

Lydia secretly thought him very like Mr. Barlow in "Sandford and Merton," and had no idea that her comparison was anything but complimentary.

"Have you ever read 'Sandford and Merton,' Uncle George?" she inquired conversationally. She had no idea of simulating a conventional grief for her mother with Uncle George, knowing instinctively that any

such display would merely embarrass him. Uncle George liked one to be intelligent and very attentive to everything he said. Lydia had often asked him questions, the answers to which left her profoundly indifferent, merely for the sake of pleasing him. Her unconsciously cynical acknowledgment to herself of her own motives at least saved her from the charge of insincerity.

Lydia had seen so little of her grandfather during the last three years that she could not remember what he liked from little girls, although she retained a vivid impression, mostly gathered from her mother, that Aunt Evelyn's noisy, slangy, hockey-playing Beatrice and Olive were not approved of by him.

Lydia, the precocious little only child of a mother half-enviously and half-contemptuously acknowledged to be "rather a fine lady" by the Raymonds and the Senthovens, was not likely to transgress in the same directions as Beatrice and Olive.

When Aunt Evelyn appeared at the dining-room door with her summons, Lydia followed her demurely upstairs. She remembered the steep, rather narrow staircase, with a blue carpet that gave place abruptly on the second flight to yellow oilcloth, and the ugly blue paper on the walls, quite well.

The drawing-room seemed altogether strange to her, but she was given no time to examine it.

"Here is little Lydia, Grandpapa," said Aunt Beryl, who stood as though on guard behind the arm-chair in the bow window, that looked out on to a distant strip of grey sea.

How *tiny* Grandpapa was!

It quite shocked Lydia to see the minute propor-

tions of the stiff little figure that sat back rigidly in the depths of the arm-chair.

Grandpapa's hand was like a claw, and his eyes looked out of a network of wrinkles such as Lydia had never seen or imagined on a human countenance.

She half expected his voice to be in proportion, but it was in very sharp, incisive tones that he addressed her:

"How d'y do, my dear? You are very young to know grief."

"Lydia has been very good and brave, and given us no trouble at all, Grandpapa," said Aunt Beryl.

"That's right. That's quite right. How old are you, Lyddie?"

Lydia suddenly remembered that her grandfather had always called her "Lyddie," although no one else ever did so.

"Twelve and a half, Grandpapa."

"Can you read?"

"Oh, yes," said Lydia, astonished.

"There is reading *and* reading," said the old man rather grimly. "If yours is very good you can read to me in the mornings, and save your Aunt Beryl."

"We shall have to see about some lessons for her in the mornings," said Aunt Beryl rather repressively.

"Eh, what's that? You don't want to go to school, do you, my dear?"

Lydia wanted to go to school very much, and had always resented her mother's refusal to send her there, and the irregular, desultory lessons at home, from which she knew that she learnt nothing useful.

But already she felt certain that to say so would not advance her cause with Grandpapa.

"I have never been to school," she said at last.

"A very good thing too. I don't like all this business of girls trying to be like boys, and learning all sorts of rough ways."

Old Raymond cast a malicious glance at his daughter Evelyn, whose two girls attended a high school.

"You're tired, Grandpapa," she said gently and unresentfully, although she coloured.

"What made you sit in the drawing-room to-day?" asked Aunt Beryl. "You know you always stay in the dining-room until six o'clock."

Grandpapa's perfectly alert old face suddenly assumed a blank expression.

"Eh, my dear?" he said vacantly.

Aunt Beryl repeated the observation in a higher key.

"I can't hear you," said Grandpapa obstinately.

Aunt Evelyn and Aunt Beryl exchanged glances.

"Don't do that, my dears, it's very ill-bred. Even little Lyddie here can tell you that. Very bad manners to exchange glances. I suppose you thought I couldn't see you, but I've got very good eyes yet."

The old man chuckled gaily at the discomfiture on the faces of the two women.

"You must come downstairs now, Grandpapa. It's tea-time," said Aunt Beryl firmly.

Lydia wondered how anyone so very old and frail could ever be taken downstairs. Did Uncle George carry him? She saw with horror that neither of her aunts made any move to assist him as he leant forward and gripped a stout stick that stood against the arm-chair.

Then he began to slide down the seat of the deep chair, his old frame quite rigid, one hand clutching the arm of the chair, the other the stick.

"Oh!" cried Lydia involuntarily.



Grandpapa, his face tense and his breathing very loud, never looked at her, but both the aunts said, "Hush!"

So she stood quite silent, very much interested and rather frightened, while the tiny, taut old frame twisted itself to the perpendicular, and at last stood erect. Then, and then only, Grandpapa accepted the support of Aunt Beryl's arm to supplement that of the stick as he went very, very slowly downstairs, one step at a time.

Aunt Evelyn, following behind with Lydia, explained to her that Grandpapa never allowed anyone to help him out of his chair.

"You will learn all the little ways of the house in time," said Aunt Evelyn kindly. "You know we hope that this is to be your home."

"Yes, auntie," said Lydia submissively.

A dim, resentful consciousness was slowly creeping over her that "to learn all the little ways of the house" is the endless and often uncongenial concomitant to that orphaned state to which she had proudly laid claim.

II

It was not difficult to learn the routine of life at Regency Terrace. By the end of the autumn Lydia felt as though she had always lived there.

It was very monotonous.

Breakfast was at eight o'clock, and Lydia found herself expected to partake of bread-and-milk, to which she was not accustomed, and which rather annoyed her because she knew they only gave it to her in order to satisfy Grandpapa's old-fashioned sense of the appropriate.

Immediately after breakfast she went out, so as to give Aunt Beryl time to see to the housekeeping before her lessons.

"A good brisk walk up and down the Front," her aunt said encouragingly. "There are never many people there early."

After September, indeed, there were hardly ever any people there at all.

Lydia did not dislike her solitary promenades from one end of the Esplanade to the other, except on the days when there was an east wind, when she hated it.

At first she was allowed to take Grandpapa's dog, Shamrock, with her, although with many misgivings on the part of Aunt Beryl. Shamrock was reputedly a Sealyham terrier, and Grandpapa was inordinately attached to him. He roared with laughter when Uncle George said angrily that the dog made a fool of him by flattening himself under the front wheel of the

bicycle which daily conveyed Uncle George to his office; and when Shamrock made all Regency Terrace hideous with howls, on the few occasions that Uncle George kicked him out of the way, Grandpapa's deafness immediately assailed him in its most pronounced form, and he assured his daughter that he could hear nothing at all, and that it was all her fancy.

"Good little dog, Shamrock," said Grandpapa approvingly, when Shamrock prostrated himself in an attitude of maudlin affection before the old man's armchair, as he invariably did, to the disgust of the household.

He also showed himself scrupulously obedient to Grandpapa's lightest word, although unfortunate Aunt Beryl might still be hoarse from prolonged cries at the hall-door in a vain endeavour to defend the bare legs of hapless little passing children, whom Shamrock took a delight in terrifying, although he never hurt them.

Lydia liked Shamrock because he always pranced along so gaily, and wagged his tail so effusively, and also because she suspected him of more than sharing her dislike of the parrot.

But their walks together were not a success. There was only one crossing, but Shamrock always contrived to negotiate it as badly as possible under an advancing tram, thus causing the driver to shout angrily at Lydia. He would simulate sudden, delighted recognitions of invalid old ladies in bath-chairs, and hurl himself upon them with extravagant demonstrations, until the bath-chair men, to most of whom he was only too well known, would seize him by the scruff of the neck and hurl him away.

Finally, as he never entered the house when Lydia

did, but invariably contrived to give her the slip and extended the excursion by himself, Aunt Beryl no longer allowed her to take him out. Lydia was sorry, but she made no lamentations. If one lived with people, it was always better to conform to their wishes, she had long ago discovered. Her innate philosophy waxed with the disproportionate rapidity sometimes seen in children who are dependent on other than their natural surroundings, for a home.

Crudely put, she conformed to each environment in which she found herself, but—and in this, Lydia, without knowing it, was exceptional—she never lost a particle of her own strong individuality. She merely waited, quite unconsciously, for an opportunity when it might expediently be set free.

With Aunt Beryl she was a docile, rather silent little girl. Aunt Beryl gave her lessons every morning from "Little Arthur," and set her arithmetic problems of which Lydia knew very well that she did not herself know the workings, and to which she merely looked up the answers in a key, and also made her practise scales upon the piano in the drawing-room.

"It will make your fingers nice and supple, even if one or two of the keys won't sound," said Aunt Beryl. "I'll write a note to the piano tuner next week."

But she never did.

Lydia thought gloomily that she was learning even less now than in the old days in London, when her mother had, at least, taught her scraps of French, and given her innumerable books to read. Aunt Beryl declared that Lydia could go on with French by herself, and a French grammar was bought.

"I'll hear you say your verbs," said Aunt Beryl, harassed, "but I've forgotten my accent long ago."

As for books, there were none in the Regency Terrace house. When Aunt Beryl wanted to read, she had recourse to *Weldon's Fashion Journal,* or to an occasional *Home Chat.* Grandpapa had the daily paper read to him, but her aunt once told Lydia that "Grandpapa used to be a great reader, but he can't see now without glasses, and he won't use them. So he never reads."

Uncle George, indeed, often brought home a book from the Public Library in the evenings, but he did not offer to lend them to Lydia, neither did such titles attract her as "Goodman's Applied Mechanics," or somebody else's "Theory of Heat, Light, and Sound." Aunt Beryl, however, was kind, and when Lydia had once said that she liked reading, she promised her a story-book for Christmas. It was then October.

Meanwhile she taught her needlework, and Lydia learnt to make her own blouses, and to knit woollen underwear for a necessitous class vaguely designated by Aunt Beryl as "the pore."

Sewing was the only thing that Aunt Beryl taught Lydia in such a way as to make it interesting. She had no lessons after dinner, which was in the middle of the day. Sometimes in the afternoon she walked slowly on the Esplanade with Aunt Beryl beside Grandpapa's chair, but more often, as the weather grew colder, she and Aunt Beryl went out alone, and then they walked briskly into what Aunt Beryl called "the town." The part where Regency Terrace stood was the "residential quarter."

"The town" mainly consisted of King Street and one of those tributary streets where the shops were. Lydia rather liked the shopping expeditions with Aunt Beryl, and felt important when the grocer's boy or

the ironmonger's young lady took an order, and said, "Yes, Miss Raymond. Good afternoon, Miss Raymond," without asking for any address.

Sometimes when Aunt Beryl's list was a long one, and the darkness of approaching winter fell early, she took Lydia in to have tea at a small establishment known to King Street as the "Dorothy Cayfe," and the shopping was resumed afterwards, in the cheerful light of the prevalent gas. This happened seldom, however, as Aunt Beryl liked to be at home, in order to give Grandpapa his tea—which was not wonderful, since whenever she failed to do so her parent never omitted to make caustic allusion to the "long outing that she must have been enjoying in the good fresh air."

When Aunt Beryl had duly been present at the rite of tea, however, it was an understood thing that she went out for a couple of hours afterwards, and left Lydia to entertain Grandpapa. "I am just going to step round to the Jacksons, dear, with my work. I'll be back by six o'clock or so." That was really the time that Lydia liked best.

She soon found out that with Grandpapa she might be her own shrewd, little cynical self. He only required outward decorum and an absence of any modern slang or noisiness, which accorded well with Lydia's natural taste and early training.

She also speedily discovered that Grandpapa thought her clever and that so long as her opinions and judgments were her own, he was ready to listen to them with amusement and interest. Any affectation or insincerity he would pounce upon in a moment. "Don't humbug," he sometimes said sharply. "It's the worst policy in the world. Humbug always ends in muddle."

"Shamrock's a humbug," said the old man once,

chuckling as he fondled the little white dog. "He's a humbug and he'll come to a bad end. When I'm dead, they'll get rid of Shamrock. They think I'm taken in by his humbug, but I know he's a bad dog."

Lydia could not help thinking that "they" had some excuse in supposing Grandpapa to be blind and deaf to his protégé's iniquities, but she put out her hand and patted the dog's rough head.

"Would you look after Shamrock, Lyddie?"

"Yes, Grandpapa, I am very fond of him."

"Why?" said Grandpapa sharply.

"Because he amuses me," answered Lydia truthfully.

"Ah ha! we all find it amusing to see other people being made fools of!" was Grandpapa's charitable sentiment. "Well, you shall have him one of these days, Lyddie. I hope you'll have a good home to give him. What do you mean to do when you're grown up?"

"Write books," said Lydia.

To Aunt Beryl she would have said, "Get married and have two boys and a little girl, auntie"—but her Aunt Beryl would never have dreamt of asking her this question.

"Heigh?" said Grandpapa, in a rather astonished voice.

"Write books."

"A blue stocking never gets a husband," said Grandpapa sententiously.

Lydia did not know what a blue stocking was, although she deduced that it was no compliment to be called one, but she was too proud to ask.

"What sort of books do you want to write?"

"Stories," said Lydia, "and perhaps poetry."

"Have you ever tried?"

"Yes, Grandpapa."

"One of these days," said Grandpapa, with cautious vagueness, "you may read me one of your stories, and we shall see what we shall see; but you mustn't expect to make a living by writing books, Lyddie. That's a thing that's only done by hard work."

"What sort of hard work?"

"There's very little hard work that women are fit for. They can go governessing, or school teaching, or nurse in hospitals. Your Aunt Beryl had a fancy that way once, but I told her she'd get as much nursing as she wanted at home, all in good time, and you see I was quite right."

"Did Aunt Evelyn want to do something, too?"

"She wanted to get married, my dear, and so she took the first young fellow that came after her. Never you do that, Lyddie."

Lydia raised surprised eyes to the old man's face.

"Well, well," said Grandpapa soothingly, "you've got twice the brains of any of them, we know that. You get them from your mother. Not that brains ever did her any good, poor soul—she was unbalanced, as clever women generally are."

"Am I unbalanced, Grandpapa?"

"Now that's a bad habit," said Grandpapa, suddenly extending a gnarled forefinger like a little twisted bit of old ivory, as though about to lay it on some objectionable insect. "That's a very bad habit, Lyddie, me dear. Don't refer everything back to yourself. It bores people. Do it in your own mind," said Grandpapa, chuckling; "no doubt you won't be able to help it—but not out loud. When someone tells you that Mrs. Smith dresses better than she walks, don't immediately go and say, like nine women out of every ten, 'Do I dress better than I walk?' "

Grandpapa assumed a piping falsetto designed to simulate a feminine voice: "And don't say, either, 'Oh, that reminds me of what was said about *me* this time nine years ago.' People don't want to hear about you—they want to hear about themselves."

"Always, Grandpapa?" said Lydia, dismayed.

"Practically always, and when you've grasped that, you've got the secret of success. *Always let the other people talk about themselves.*"

Lydia's memory was a retentive one, and to the end of her life, at the oddest, most unexpected moments, Grandpapa's aphorism, delivered in the very tones of his cracked, sardonic old voice, was destined to return to her, always with increased appreciation of its cynical penetration into the weakness of human nature:

"Always let the other people talk about themselves."

With the advent of Aunt Beryl and the lamp, needless to say, Grandpapa ceased imparting these educational items to Lydia.

He listened to Aunt Beryl's account of Mrs. Jackson's asthma, agreed that Uncle George was late back from the office, and became deaf and vacant-eyed when Aunt Beryl reproachfully said that Shamrock had brought a live crab into the front hall, and upset the girl's temper. At seven o'clock, Aunt Beryl and Lydia went away to don evening blouses, and, in the case of Aunt Beryl, a "dressy" black silk skirt, and half an hour later they all had supper in the dining-room.

Once a week, Wednesdays, Mr. Monteagle Almond, from the Bank, used to come in at nine o'clock and play chess with Uncle George. He told Lydia once that he had never missed a Wednesday evening, except when either or both were away, during the last fifteen years.

"And I don't suppose," solemnly said Mr. Almond, "I shall miss one for the next fifteen—not if we're both spared."

He was a dried-up-looking little man, with a thin beard and a nearly bald head, and both Uncle George and Aunt Beryl chaffed him facetiously from time to time on the subject of getting married, but Mr. Monteagle Almond never retaliated by turning the tables on them, as Lydia privately considered that he might well have done.

On the evenings when Mr. Almond was not present, Aunt Beryl very often took off her shoes and rested her feet, which were always causing her pain, against the rung of a chair. Sometimes, when Gertrude had cleared away, she hung over the dining-room table, spread with paper patterns and rolls of material, and after hovering undecidedly for a long while, would suddenly pounce on her largest pair of scissors and begin to slash away with every appearance of recklessness. But the recklessness was always justified when the dress or the blouse was finished. She was never too much absorbed to remember Lydia's bedtime, however, and at nine o'clock every night Lydia was expected to rouse Grandpapa from the light slumber into which he would never admit that he had fallen, Uncle George from the newspaper or "Applied Mechanics," and shake hands with them gravely as she said good night.

Only the game of chess might not be interrupted.

Aunt Beryl always came up to say good night to Lydia in her nice little room at the top of the house.

"Sure you're quite warm enough, dear?"

"Yes, quite, thank you, auntie."

"There's another blanket whenever you want one. You've only to say. Have you said your prayers?"

"Yes."

"And brushed your teeth?"

"Yes, auntie."

"Good night, dearie. Sleep well."

Aunt Beryl tucked her up and kissed her, and sometimes she said: "Sleep on your back and tuck in the clothes, and then the fleas won't bite your toes."

Then she went downstairs again, and Lydia never heard her and Uncle George going up to bed, for Grandpapa always refused to stir before twelve o'clock, and sometimes later, and it was necessary that both of them should wait so as to keep him company and eventually take him up to his room. The only variety in the week was Sunday, and even Sundays had their own routine. A later breakfast and a morning in church were succeeded by a heavy midday meal and a somnolent afternoon for Aunt Beryl and Grandpapa. Uncle George very often took Lydia for a long walk, in the course of which he became more than ever like Mr. Barlow, and would suddenly, while crossing the railway bridge, propound such inquiries as:

"Now, what do you suppose is meant by the word *Tare,* on the left-hand bottom corner of those trucks?"

Lydia very seldom knew the answer to these conundrums, but whether she did or no, she was sufficiently aware that no scentific precision of reply on her part would have given her uncle half the satisfaction that it did to enlighten her ignorance. Accordingly, she generally said demurely:

"I've often wondered, Uncle George. I should like to know what it means."

She always listened to Uncle George's accurate and painstaking explanations and tried to remember them. Suspecting extraordinary deficiencies in Aunt Beryl's

system of education, she was genuinely desirous of supplementing them whenever she could.

Her ambitions to acquire learning, accomplishments, and the achievement of extreme personal beauty, all of which seemed to her to be equally far from realization, were Lydia's only troubles at Regency Terrace.

On the former questions she had determined to approach either her uncle or her grandfather after Christmas. Not before, Lydia shrewly decided, or they would say that she was in too great a hurry, that she had not yet had a fair trial of the system of regular lessons at home. In foresight and appraisement of valuation where the touchstone of what she considered to be her own best interest was concerned, Lydia's judgment and calm, unchildlike tenacity of purpose might have been envied by a financier. But to the question of her own appearance, she brought all the ridiculous finality, childish vanity and exaggeration, of twelve-year-old femininity. She spent a long time in front of her small looking-glass, almost every day, staring at her little pointed face, seeking desperately for traces of beauty in her olive skin and straight brows and wishing that her eyes were blue, or brown, or even grey—anything except a dark, variable sort of hazel. The only satisfaction she got was from the contemplation of her hair, which was long and dark and very thick. Aunt Beryl made her wear it in two plaits, during the day-time, but Lydia did not dislike this; as the plaits undone and carefully brushed out in the evenings, gave a momentary wave to the perfectly straight mass.

Lydia brushed it off her forehead and fastened it back with a round comb, and thought that she looked rather like the pictures of "Alice Through the Looking-Glass."

She was tall for her age, which was another source of satisfaction, but the length of her slim hands and feet were a terrible portent of inordinate future growth, and Aunt Beryl, with a foresight unappreciated by her niece, insisted upon a precautionary and unsightly tuck in all Lydia's garments.

But in spite of the tucks, and the frequent east wind, and Aunt Beryl's lessons, and the complete absence of any society of her own age, Lydia liked Regency Terrace very much.

She had an odd appreciation for the security implied by the very monotony of each day as it slipped by. With her mother there had been no security at all. They had come from China when Lydia was five, and she could only just remember a little about the voyage, and the terrible parting from her Amah. After that, they had been in London, sometimes at a boarding-house, sometimes in rooms, once in a big hotel where Lydia had had her first alarming, unforgettable experience of going up and downstairs in a lift. When Lydia was six, and her father had gone back to China, she and her mother had stayed first with one relation and then with another, and none of the visits had been very comfortable nor successful. Lydia's mother had cried and said that no one understood the sort of thing she was used to in Hong Kong, and what a dreadful change it was for her to be without a man to look after her.

Lydia, a detached and solemn little girl, had retained from those early years a dislike of scenes and tears, and self-pitying rhapsodies, that was to remain with her for the rest of her life.

They were in London when Lydia's mother became

a widow and the next three years had been worse than ever.

Lydia was sent to stay with Aunt Evelyn, and then, just as she was beginning to feel rather more at home with her noisy, teasing cousins, her mother fetched her away again and they went to rooms in Hampstead. But the landlady there objected to the number of times that Lydia's mother asked her friends, although only one at a time, to come and have supper and spend the evening. The two ladies would sit up very late, while Lydia's mother talked of all that made her unhappy, and generally cried a great deal, and very often, even after the visitor had gone, would come and wake Lydia up by kneeling at her bedside and sobbing there.

From Hampstead, her mother went as paying guest to a family in West Kensington and Lydia was sent to a boarding-school. She never forgot the mortification of her mother's sudden descent upon her, when she had been there nearly a whole term, to say that she had come to take her away.

"But she's getting on so well!" the head mistress, whom Lydia liked, had protested. "You're very happy with us, aren't you, dear?"

"Yes," Lydia had muttered miserably, and with only too much truth.

She had been happier than ever before, and had made friends with other little girls, and enjoyed the games they played, and the interesting lessons. And she had felt almost sure of getting a prize at the end of the year. But she knew with a dreadful certainty that if she showed her great reluctance to leaving school, and her disappointment and humiliation at being taken away without rhyme or reason, her mother would have a fit of the tempestuous crying that Lydia

so dreaded, and would say how heartless it was of her little girl not to want to come home, "now that they only had each other." So she swallowed very hard, and looked down on the floor, clenching her hands, and made hardly any protest at all. Her only comfort was that her mother's impetuosity, which could never wait, insisted upon her immediate departure. And Lydia was glad to avoid any farewells, with the astonished questions and comments that must have accompanied them.

She felt that she could never bear to see the nice Kensington school again.

After that she had lessons or holidays as seemed good to her mother, and very seldom spent a consecutive three months in the same place. No wonder that Regency Terrace, unaltered in half a century, seemed a very haven of refuge to Mrs. Raymond's child.

III

EXPERIENCE has to be bought, generally at the cost of some humiliating youthful mistakes. Those who profit by these unpleasant transactions early in life may be congratulated.

Lydia, the anxious diplomatist, so acutely desirous of keeping in the good graces of those who had control of her destiny, found that she had made a mistake in approaching Grandpapa privately upon the momentous subject.

Grandpapa, indeed, had received her carefully-thought-out explanation with not too bad a grace.

"So you don't think you're learning enough, eh, Lyddie? D'you think you know more than Aunt Beryl already?"

Lydia had nearly cried.

"No, Grandpapa," she began in the horrified accents of outraged conventionality, when she remembered in time Grandpapa's uncanny faculty for penetrating to one's real true, inmost opinion.

"Not more," she said boldly, "but I know as much of Little Arthur's History as there is in the book, and auntie can't take me any further in French or fractions, and she never has time to give me proper music lessons. I only do scales, and Weber's Last Valse, by myself. And I can *feel* I'm not getting on, Grandpapa—and I do so want to."

"Why?"

"I've got to earn my own living," said Lydia, rather

proud of the words, "and besides, I'm going to write books."

"Can you spell?"

"Yes, Grandpapa."

"You'll be the first woman of my acquaintance that could, then," said Grandpapa unbelievingly.

"But there are heaps of other things I ought to know besides spelling," she urged.

"Well, I suppose that's true. But what is it you want to do? I won't pay for a Madame to come and parlyvoo every day," said Grandpapa in sarcastic allusion to a recent flight on the part of Aunt Beryl's friends, the Jacksons.

"Would it be very expensive to let me go to school for a little bit, Grandpapa?"

"What, and come back a great hulking tomboy, all muddy boots, and scratched hands like your cousins?"

There was less opposition than Lydia had expected in his manner, and she began to plead eagerly.

"I wouldn't, truly I wouldn't—I needn't play games at all. It's only for the lessons I want to go. Beatrice and Olive only like it for the hockey, they *hate* their lessons. But I would work all the time, Grandpapa, and bring back heaps of prizes."

"Mind, if I let you go at all, it would be only as a day boarder," said Grandpapa warningly. But there was more than a hint of concession in his tone.

"That's all I want," said Lydia.

"I'll think it over, and talk to your aunt. Now go and fetch me to-day's paper."

Grandpapa occasionally made a feint of reading the newspaper to himself, although he was never seen to turn over a page.

"I can't, Grandpapa. Aunt Beryl took it away, but she is going to bring it back this evening."

"You *can't?*" said Grandpapa in a voice that contrived to be terrible, although it was so small and high-pitched: "Don't talk nonsense! There's no such thing as *can't.* There's *won't,* if you like."

Lydia felt very much distressed. Grandpapa's anger and contempt were not pleasant at any time, and just now when he appeared so nearly disposed to grant her heart's desire, she was less than ever wishful of incurring them.

"Aunt Beryl has lent the paper to Mrs. Jackson for something," she faltered, feeling much disposed to cry. "She said you were sure not to want it before to-night."

"Quite wrong. I want it at once. Now don't say *can't* again," said Grandpapa sharply.

The unfortunate Lydia looked helplessly at her tyrant.

"There's no such thing as *can't,*" said Grandpapa truculently. "Just you take hold of that and don't you ever forget it. Never place any reliance on a person who says *can't.* Let 'em say they won't—or they don't want to—that may be true. The other isn't. Anybody can do anything, if they only make up their minds to it."

Grandpapa and his descendant faced one another in silence for a minute or so across the echo of this Spartan theory. At last the old man said contemptuously:

"If you haven't learnt *that* yet, you're not ready for any more schooling than we can give you here, I can tell you."

It was as Lydia had feared!

The future of one's education, the whole of one's career in fact, was at stake.

Lydia gulped at an enormous lump in her throat and managed to articulate with sufficient determination:

"I'll fetch it."

Then she hurried out of the room, wondering what on earth she should do next.

Rush out and buy another paper?

The shops were a long way off, and very likely the morning papers might be all sold out.

The station book stall?

That again was open to the same objections.

Borrow one from somebody else?

But whom?

Suddenly Lydia caught her breath.

Why not? It seemed obvious, once one had thought of it.

She hastily put on her hat, left the front door ajar behind her, and walked out into the road and down a street that ran at an angle to Regency Terrace.

"If you please, Mr. Raymond would be glad to have the morning paper back again if Mrs. Jackson has quite finished with it," she said politely, relieved that it was late enough in the day for "the girl" to open the door of the Jackson establishment to her, instead of one of the family.

Five minutes later she was again confronting Grandpapa, this time feeling triumphant and highly pleased with herself.

"I've got it, Grandpapa!"

Grandpapa's claw-like old hand shot out and snatched at the newspaper.

"What's the date on it?" he demanded.

Lydia read it aloud.

"That's to-day's all right."

"I went round and asked——" began Lydia, desirous of exploiting her resourcefulness.

"That'll do, me dear. Never spoil an achievement by a long story about it," said Grandpapa. "I asked for the paper and you've brought it. That's quite enough."

"Yes, Grandpapa," said Lydia submissively.

Grandpapa pointed the moral no further but Lydia had unconsciously added another paragraph to the Book of Rules which was to guide her throughout the mysterious game that was just beginning for her: "There's no such thing as can't."

She heard nothing more for the next few days of her ambitious request to be sent to school, and was far too cautious to risk a peremptory refusal through importunity.

It was a week later that she became uncomfortably aware of an indefinable alteration in her aunt's manner towards her.

"Is anything the matter, auntie?" she gently ventured.

"Why should anything be the matter, dear?" said Aunt Beryl, her lips very close together and her gaze not meeting Lydia's.

The child's heart sank.

Quite obviously Aunt Beryl was offended, and meant to adopt the trying policy of ignoring any cause for offence. Twice she was too tired to come upstairs and say good night to Lydia, although this had never happened before, and several times when Lydia made little obvious comments, of the sort that always constituted conversation between them on their walks,

Aunt Beryl appeared to be too much absorbed in thought to have heard her.

"I would much rather be scolded," reflected Lydia dismally.

She was not scolded, but Aunt Beryl's sense of grievance presently passed into a more articulate stage.

"Oh, don't ask *me*, dear. I'm nobody. *I* don't know anything," she suddenly exclaimed with extreme bitterness, on a request for advice in respect of Lydia's knitting.

"Oh, auntie! are you angry?"

"Why should I be angry, dear? I may be *grieved*, but that's another matter."

On this ground Aunt Beryl finally took her stand.

"I'm not angry, dear—I'm grieved."

And grieved Aunt Beryl remained, tacitly waving away all Lydia's timid attempts at apology or explanation.

Could anything be better calculated to make one feel thoroughly remorseful and uncomfortable?

Lydia, however, characteristically felt more resentful than remorseful.

The tension of the situation was slightly relieved one evening, greatly to Lydia's surprise, by Mr. Monteagle Almond.

"So you're being sent to school, young lady?" he reremarked quietly, making Lydia jump.

"Oh, am I?"

"You ought to know. I understand that a certain young lady, not a hundred miles away from where we are now, asked to be sent to school, so that she might grow very learned. Isn't that so?"

"I *should* like to go to school," faltered Lydia.

"Very natural," said Mr. Almond indulgently.

"Companions of your own age attract you, no doubt. What would childhood be without other children, eh, George? You remember?"

"I was not so well provided as you were, Monty," said Uncle George rather resentfully.

"Indeed, no. Are you aware, young lady, that I was one of a family of fifteen?"

Aunt Beryl made a clicking sound with her tongue.

"Yes, Miss Raymond, fifteen. My father and mother were old-fashioned people, and held that each child carried a blessing with it. Three died in infancy, and a young brother was lost at sea. Otherwise I'm thankful to say that we are all spared to this day."

"Fancy!" said Aunt Beryl in a flat voice.

"Fifteen children," repeated the grey-bearded clerk, "and my mother kept her figure to the last day of her life. A lesson to the young wives of to-day, I often think."

"Your bedtime, Lydia," said Aunt Beryl briskly. "Go upstairs now and I'll come and put the light out."

Lydia was much too tactful to point out that it was still ten minutes before her bedtime, understanding perfectly that the indiscreetness of Mr. Monteagle Almond's conversation was responsible for her accelerated departure.

She had learnt that she was really going to school, and she was happy.

Aunt Beryl gradually became reconciled to the loss of her pupil, and presently began to show signs of pride in Lydia's advancement.

Once or twice Lydia heard her talking to Mrs. Jackson in the rapid undertones always adopted by Aunt Beryl and Aunt Evelyn with their friends.

"Quite a backward child, when she came to us last year. Between ourselves, my sister-in-law never took much trouble . . . I was quite against sending her to Miss Glover's at first—you know, I thought she'd be so behind in everything. So she was, too, but the way that child has picked up! You really wouldn't believe it—I'm sure half the sums in her book I couldn't do myself. Never was good at figures."

Lydia was very proud of her faculty for arithmetic. She thought very little of being first in her class for English composition, and none of the other girls thought much of it either, but they all envied her when the weekly announcement came, as it frequently did:

"Problem No. 15. No one got that right except Lydia Raymond. Stand up, Lydia Raymond, and show the class the working of No. 15 on the black-board. 'If a train left Glasgow at 8.45 a.m. on Wednesday, travelling at the rate of 60 miles an hour——' "

Lydia enjoyed those problems, worked by herself on the black-board in full view of half-a-dozen befogged, pencil-chewing seniors.

But for her French, Lydia would have found herself more highly placed than she was in the school.

Monday and Thursday afternoons.

O horrible verbs, O hateful *Première Année de Grammaire,* and thrice-hateful genders!

Why should a table be feminine and an arm-chair masculine?

Lydia hated her French, and continued to say "Esker le feneter de la salong ay ouvere?" in a lamentable voice and an unalterably British accent. Very few of Miss Glover's girls were "good at French." Only three had any acquaintance with German, and of these one was Dutch.

Many of them could play the piano correctly, and even brilliantly, some of them could copy free-hand drawings or plaster casts, but hardly one could write a letter without making mistakes in spelling, punctuation, and English. All, unconsciously enough, were more or less defective in the correct pronunciation of English.

Since brains, in Great Britain, are for the most part the prerogative of the middle classes, it follows that their possessors enjoy a certain prestige among their compeers which would, on those same grounds, be denied them in more exalted circles.

Lydia found that her schoolfellows were proud of her cleverness, and disposed to seek her friendship.

She easily assumed leadership amongst the group of girls of her own age who were also day boarders at Miss Glover's.

"*Do* help me with this beastly sum, Lydia. I'm sure you can do it."

Lydia always acceded very graciously to such frequent requests, partly because she loved to show her own superior attainments, and partly because of a very definite conviction, which she had never yet put into words, that it was always worth while to show oneself agreeable. In consequence of this complacence, she was seldom at a loss for companionship in play-time. There was always someone to walk about with, arms round one another's waists after the immemorial schoolgirl practice, heads close together under black or scarlet tam o' shanter, for a better exchange of confidences.

Then Lydia put into practice Grandpapa's Golden Rule: ***Always let the other people talk about themselves.***

"I say, Lydia, I'll tell you a secret. Mind, now, you're not to say a word to anyone, because I promised not to tell . . . but I know I can trust you?"

An interrogative turn to that last sentence.

"Yes, truly you can, Ethel. Tell me."

"Well, promise you won't tell. Not even if you're asked?"

"Cross my heart——" in the glib, accustomed formula.

"Well, then, Daisy Butcher and May Holt have had a row. You know what *frightful* friends they've been ever since the beginning of the term? Well, it's all over, and they've quarrelled. Only don't ever say I said so because Edith told me, and I said I wouldn't say because it was May Holt herself who told her, and she made her promise not to say. I wouldn't say a word myself, only I really thought you *ought* to know, sitting next to May in class and everything. I say, do you *like* May Holt?"

Lydia, who thought May Holt common and stupid, was for a moment tempted to say so. Then, innate caution and a distrust of her companion's garrulity restrained her.

"She's all right," she said vaguely. "I thought you were rather friends with her?"

"Not now," said Ethel hastily. "If the quarrel comes out and there's any taking sides, I shall be on Daisy's side. I think May Holt's been awfully mean. I simply can't bear mean ways. I'm like that, you know."

Thus Ethel's confidences, similar to scores of others, all ending in an exposition of the speaker's view of her own personal traits of character.

Storms raged in teacups, confidences were violated, the identical Ethel who had sworn Lydia to secrecy

on the May and Daisy quarrel, found herself taxed with various indiscreet utterances and sent to Coventry.

"Well, it was Edith who told me, and she said May Holt was a liar, what's more," sobbed Ethel, in counter-accusation that availed her nothing, although it raised fresh and terrible issues between herself and Edith, and again between Edith and May Holt, and all May Holt's partisans.

Lydia listened to it all, and thought how clever she had been to keep clear of all this trouble.

It was a thing always to be remembered—the unwisdom of uttering opinions that would probably be repeated to their object—never, never to say anything that could not be safely repeated without making for one an enemy.

Lydia silently added this conviction to her increasing store of worldly wisdom.

So she welcomed the confidences of the other girls, most of whom seemed quite unable to prevent themselves from talking, and she was at the same time very careful never to render herself unpopular by mischief-making or by carrying backwards and forwards any of their indiscreet utterances.

"You can always trust Lydia," said one or two of the girls.

And once she heard one of them exclaim:

"I've never heard Lydia Raymond say an unkind word about anybody."

It sounded very sweet and charitable, but Lydia, with a sense of humour not unlike her grandfather's, had a little grim, private laugh at the irony of it.

Several of her schoolfellows asked her to tea, or to an occasional picnic in the summer, but Lydia very often regretfully said that her aunt did not like her to

go out much, and declined the invitations, without ever referring them to Aunt Beryl at all.

She had a fastidious idea that she did not want to be reputed "great friends" with the children of the more superior tradespeople, or even with the two youthful social lights of the establishment, the daughters of a rich local dentist.

Instinct, and certain recollections of her mother, led her to seek the friendship of a quiet little girl, actually a boarder, whose home was in the west of England, and of whom Lydia only knew that her father was a clergyman, and that she had nice manners and somehow spoke differently from the others. Her name was Nathalie Palmer.

Nathalie did not make so many confidences as did the other girls, and when she did talk to Lydia it was of Devonshire and of her own home, not of the people at school.

This Lydia observed, instinctively approved, and inwardly made note of for future imitation.

As Nathalie knew no one outside the school, she was naturally unable to ask Lydia to come home with her, but just before the midsummer break-up her father came to visit her.

He stayed for two days at the Seaview Hotel, and Nathalie took Lydia to luncheon there.

Mr. Palmer looked old to be the father of fourteen-year-old Nathalie, and had a slow, clerical manner of speech that rather overawed Lydia.

She had never had a meal at any hotel since the days with her mother and father in London, that seemed now so immeasurably remote, and she felt rather nervous. Politely answering Mr. Palmer's kind inquiries as to her place in class, her favourite games and les-

sons, she was all the time anxiously casting surreptitious glances at Nathalie to see how she helped herself to the strange and numerous dishes proferred by the waiter.

Aunt Beryl was very particular about "table-manners," but at Regency Terrace there was never any such bewildering profusion of knives and forks to perplex one.

Once Lydia embarked upon the butter-dish, offered by Mr. Palmer, with her own small knife, and then, leaving it in the butter-dish, found only a very large knife left beside her plate with which to spread it.

Shame and disaster threatened.

Lydia looked up, and her distressed gaze met that of a waiter. To her own effable surprise, she made a movement of her head that brought him deferentially to her elbow with the required implement. Simplicity itself!

Lydia inwardly decided that one need never be frightened, in the most unaccustomed surroundings, if only one kept one's head and never betrayed any sense of insecurity.

Next day she had the gratification of being shyly told by Nathalie:

"Father said what a pretty face you had, Lydia, and what nice manners. He was so glad I'd got such a nice friend, and he said I might ask you whether one day your aunt would let you come and stay with us during the holidays."

IV

WHEN Lydia was fifteen, expectant of Honours in her examinations, highly placed in the school, and with a secret hope that the following term might see her Head of the School—and that, moreover, at an unprecedently early age—unexpected disaster overtook her.

The three placid years at Regency Terrace had been so little marked by any changes that she had forgotten that old sense of the insecurity and impermanence of life, bred of early days with her mother, and it came as a shock to her that anything should interfere seriously with her schemes.

Quite unexpectedly she fell ill.

"I don't like that cough of yours, Lydia."

"It's only a cold, auntie."

"It doesn't seem to get any better. Let me see, how long have you had it now?"

Lydia pretended to think that Aunt Beryl was only talking to herself, and bent lower over her books. She always worked at her preparation in the evenings after supper now.

It was damp, chilly weather, and her cough grew worse, although she stifled it as far as possible, and said nothing about the pains in her back and sides.

Aunt Beryl brought her a bottle of cough mixture recommended by Mrs. Jackson, and Lydia put it on the mantlepiece in her bedroom, and carefully dusted the bottle every day, and sometimes poured away a little of the contents.

But one morning, one important morning when there was a French lesson which it was essential that Lydia, with whom French still remained the weakest of links in an otherwise well-forged chain, should attend, she found herself quite unable to go downstairs to breakfast.

Her head swam, her eyes and mouth were burning, and her legs unaccountably trembled beneath her.

"No such thing as *can't,*" muttered Lydia fiercely, repeating Grandpapa's favourite axiom.

The pain in her side had increased without warning, and suddenly gave her an unendurable stab every time that she tried to move.

"Oh!"

Lydia sank back on the bed, and found herself crying hoarsely from pain and dismay. Surely even Grandpapa would admit the necessity for saying "can't" at last.

But Lydia did not see Grandpapa for some time after that morning.

She lay in bed with a fire in the room, sometimes suffering a great deal of pain, and sometimes in a sort of strange, jumbled dream, when the pattern of the wall paper turned into mysterious columns of figures that would never add up, and French Irregular Verbs danced across the ceiling.

Aunt Beryl nursed her all day and sat up with her at nights very often, and Dr. Young came to see her every day.

Once he said to her:

"You're a very good patient. I don't know what we should have done with you if you hadn't been a good, reasonable girl, and done everything you were told."

Lydia was pleased.

"Am I very ill?" she asked.

"Oh, you've turned the corner nicely now," said Dr. Young cheerfully. "But pneumonia's no joke, and you'll have to be careful for a long while yet."

"Shan't I be able to go up for the examination?"

"Let me see—that's about a month off. We shall have to see about that."

Dr. Young's daughter was at Miss Glover's school, too, and he knew all about the terrible importance of the examination. Nevertheless, he gave Lydia no permission to resume her studies.

"Don't worry, dear, there's plenty of time before you, and now I've got some nice fruit jelly for you," said Aunt Beryl, and Lydia always thanked her very gratefully and lay back against the pillow, trying all the time to recapitulate the French verbs and the list of Exceptions to Rules that she had been learning when she first fell ill.

Except for anxiety about the examination, convalescence was agreeable.

Uncle George came up to see her one day, and brought her some grapes, and explained to her why it was that the great pieces of ice in her glass of barley-water did not cause it to overflow, quite in the old Mr. Barlow manner, and once Nathalie Palmer came by invitation and had tea with her upstairs, and told her how sorry all the girls had been about her illness.

"And you'll miss the exam," moaned Nathalie, "and it seems such a shame. I know you'd have done splendidly."

"What have you been having in class?" asked Lydia.

"Almost all recapitulation. The only really new thing that we're doing is *Henry V.* for literature."

That evening Lydia made Gertrude, the servant, bring her the volume of Shakespeare from the drawing-room.

Her brain felt quite clear now, and her eyes no longer hurt her when she tried to read.

Next day she was allowed to go downstairs for tea.

Aunt Beryl, who looked very tired and sallow, helped her to dress, and Uncle George came upstairs to fetch her, and they both supported her very carefully down the stairs and into the drawing-room, where a fire had been lit, and a special tea laid on a little table beside the arm-chair.

Grandpapa, with Shamrock prancing unrestainedly at his feet, and the parrot, brought up from the dining-room, hanging upside down in his cage on the centre-table, were all waiting to welcome her.

"Very glad to see you down, me dear," said Grandpapa, shaking hands with her formally. "A nasty time you've had, a very nasty time, I'm afraid."

"She's been such a good girl, Grandpapa," said Aunt Beryl, raising her voice as though by a great effort. "Dr. Young says she's the best patient he's ever had."

"Did you have to swallow a great deal of physic, Lyddie? Ah, a very disagreeable thing, physic," said Grandpapa, who was ordered a certain draught daily, which he was only too apt to pour away into the nearest receptacle in the face of all Aunt Beryl's protests.

"Mr. Almond asked after you on Wednesday, Lydia. He has been quite concerned over your illness," Uncle George told her.

Lydia sat back in the arm-chair, her long plaits fall-

ing over either shoulder, and could not help feeling that all this attention was rather agreeable.

Aunt Beryl's friend, Mrs. Jackson, "stepped in," to ask how she felt, and to borrow a paper pattern for a blouse, and said she had also heard from Dr. Young and other sources what a good patient Lydia had been.

"And so hard on you, poor child, missing your examinations and all."

"Perhaps Dr. Young will let me go," said Lydia wistfully. "It's only four days, and not till next week."

Mrs. Jackson shook her head doubtfully.

"The Town Hall is well warmed, with those pipes and all, but I don't know. Perhaps if you could go in a closed cab, well wrapped up. . . . But you've missed such a lot of study, haven't you?"

"I know," said Lydia dejectedly.

They were all very kind to her, and seemed to realize the great disappointment of failing after all, or even of putting off the examination for another year, when one would be nearly sixteen, and no longer the youngest candidate of all.

Mrs. Jackson refused tea, and hurried away with her paper pattern, Shamrock flying to the head of the stairs after her, and breaking into a storm of howls, as though in protest at her departure. Aunt Beryl hastened distressfully after him.

"Hark at that!" said she unnecessarily.

Grandpapa put on his deafest expression.

"This is very trying for you, Lydia," said Uncle George pointedly. "It seems to go through and through one's head."

Did Grandpapa actually throw a glance of concern at the invalid? She could hardly believe her eyes, and

felt more than ever how pleasant it was to be the centre of attention.

And then Aunt Beryl came in again, dropped into a chair near the door, oddly out of breath, and quietly fainted away.

Gertrude had been sent for Dr. Young before they could bring her back to consciousness again, and when he did arrive, he and Uncle George almost carried Aunt Beryl up to her room.

"Thoroughly overdone," said Dr. Young. "Miss Raymond has been so very unsparing of herself during her niece's illness—one of those unselfish people, you know, who never think anything about themselves. I am ashamed of myself for not seeing how near she was to a break-down."

Decidedly Aunt Beryl was the heroine of the hour.

Lydia was ashamed of herself for the resentment that this turning of the tables awoke in her.

She went to her own room, unescorted, when the commotion had subsided, and her supper was brought up to her by Gertrude nearly an hour late.

"How is Aunt Beryl now?" she asked.

"Gone to sleep, miss. She is wore out, after sitting up at night, and then the nursing during the day, and seeing to the house and the old gentleman, all just the same as usual—and no wonder."

No wonder, indeed! Everyone said the same.

During the two days that Aunt Beryl, by the doctor's orders, remained upstairs, the household in Regency Terrace had time to realize what, in fact, was the case—that never before had Miss Raymond been absent from her post for more than a few hours at a time.

When Mr. Monteagle Almond came in on Wednes-

day evening, full of inquiries and congratulations for Lydia, he was hardly allowed time to formulate them.

"It's my poor sister we are anxious about," said Uncle George, just as though Lydia had never been ill at all.

"Quite knocked up with nursing," said Grandpapa, shaking his head. "I've never known Beryl take to her bed before, and we miss her sadly downstairs."

Mr. Monteagle Almond was deeply concerned.

"Dear me, dear me. This is very distressing news. I had no idea of this. Miss Raymond never complains."

"That's it," agreed Uncle George gloomily. "One somehow never thought of her overdoing it."

"Unselfish," said Mr. Almond, adding thoughfully: "Well, well, well, selfish people have the best of it in this world, there's no doubt."

The little bank clerk was generalizing, according to his fashion, but Lydia felt angry and uncomfortable, as though the reference might have application to herself.

Aunt Beryl certainly looked much as usual when she reappeared downstairs, but it was very evident that two days without her had thoroughly awakened both Grandpapa and Uncle George to a new sense of her importance.

"We must try and spare your aunt as much as possible," Uncle George said gravely to Lydia. "I'm afraid that we've all been allowing her to do far too much for us."

Lydia found it curiously disagreeable to see the focus of general interest thus shifted. Unconsciously, she had occupied the centre place in the little group in Regency Terrace ever since her arrival there, as the

twelve-year-old orphan, in her pathetic black frock. Without consciously posing, she had certainly, as the eager student at Miss Glover's bringing back prizes and commendations, been the most striking personality of that small world, and she had known that her elders discussed her cleverness, her steady industry, even her increasing prettiness, as topics of paramount interest.

Lydia, in other words, was complacently aware of being the heroine of that story, which is the aspect worn by life to the imaginative. Now it appeared that this rôle had been summarily usurped by Aunt Beryl.

Lydia's sense of drama was far too keen for her to undervalue the possibilities of the aspect presented by her aunt. It *was* pathetic to have toiled, without appreciation, all these years, to have nursed one's niece devotedly day and night, and then to faint away helplessly without a word of complaint. But the more Lydia realized how pathetic it was, the more annoyed she became.

Her own convalescence was a very rapid one, partly owing to her determination to get to the Town Hall for the examination. Both Grandpapa and Uncle George, with the masculine inability to entertain more than one anxiety at a time, appeared to have forgotten that she had ever been ill, and Dr. Young himself, when applied to, only said:

"Well, well, if you've really set your mind on it—the weather's nice and warm. But you must wrap up well and keep out of draughts. We don't want a relapse, mind. Miss Raymond can't do any more nursing, you know. She ought to be nursed herself."

Lydia would cheerfully have nursed Aunt Beryl, if only to retain her own sense of self-importance, but well did she know that her aunt would give her no

such opportunity. Really, unselfish people could be very trying.

She went to the Town Hall, and was greatly restored by the enthusiastic greetings of her fellow-candidates.

"Oh, Lydia, how plucky of you to try, after all! Don't you feel *fearfully* behindhand? Fancy, if you do get through! It'll be even more splendid than if you hadn't been ill, and had no disadvantage of missing such a lot."

Lydia had a shrewd suspicion that she had not missed nearly so much as they all thought. Nathalie had said that most of the work done in class during her absence had been recapitulation, and recapitulation, to Lydia's sound memory and habits of accuracy inculcated by Uncle George, had never been more than a pleasant form of making assurance doubly sure.

For the last two days she had been studying frantically, and had made Nathalie go through *Henry V.* with her, and mark the passages to be learnt by heart.

Fortune favoured her in causing the English Literature paper to be set for the last day of the examination.

When that last day came Lydia felt tolerably certain that she had thoroughly overtaxed her barely-restored strength, and would shortly suffer for it with some severity, but her examination-papers had been a series of inward triumphs.

French had certainly presented its usual stumbling-blocks, but Lydia reasonably told herself that she would probably have experienced at least equivalent difficulties, had she attended every class, and where mechanical rote-learning could avail her, she knew that she was safe. Moreover, the algebra and arithmetic papers, over which most of the candidates were groaning, she could view with peculiar complacency.

"How did you get on?" several of the girls asked her eagerly.

"Not *too* badly, I hope," said Lydia guardedly.

It would be far more of a triumph, if she did succeed, for her success to come as a surprise to everyone. They could hardly expect it, after such an absence from class as hers had been.

Even the governess in charge of the group of girls said to her kindly:

"You mustn't be disappointed if you don't get through this time, dear. Miss Glover knows you've worked very well, and that it's only illness that's thrown you back."

Lydia returned to Regency Terrace thoroughly exhausted.

"I'm sure you've done your best, dear, and if it isn't this time, it'll be next," said Aunt Beryl philosophically. "Now go straight upstairs and have a good rest."

Lydia went, and was not at all displeased to find that her head was throbbing and her face colourless.

The following day the doctor saw her, and shook his head at her.

"Better give her a change of air, Miss Raymond. If you won't go away yourself, it will, anyway, set you rather more free not to have Miss Lydia on your mind."

Lydia felt that the advice might have been worded in a manner more flattering to herself, but she was pleased at the idea of a change.

She had not been away since her first arrival as an inmate of Grandpapa's household. Aunt Beryl's theory was that one went away *to* the sea, not *from* it. If one happened to live by the sea, there was no need to go away at all. Only Uncle George, taking his

fortnightly holiday in the summer, departed on a walking or bicycling tour with some bachelor friend of his own.

"You'll enjoy staying with your Aunt Evelyn," said Aunt Beryl. "The girls must be nearly grown-up now, I declare. How time flies! Beatrice must be all of eighteen, and Olive sixteen, and I suppose Bob is somewhere between the two of them. How long is it since you've seen them, Lydia?"

"Not since I was quite little—about ten, I think."

"It'll be nice for you to make friends with the girls. I've often wished you had a sister."

Lydia did not echo the wish when she had seen the Senthoven family circle.

"There's no nonsense about *us*," might have been taken for their motto, or even their war-cry.

On the evening of Lydia's arrival she was mysteriously taken possession of by Olive, her youngest cousin, under pretext of unpacking.

"I say, Lydia."

"Yes?"

"*Yes?*" mimicked Olive, with a screwed-up mouth and mincing pronunciation, in derisive mockery of Lydia's low, clear enunciation, which was in part natural, and in part learnt from Nathalie Palmer.

"I declare you're afraid of the sound of your own voice. You ought to hear *us!* My word! we'll make you open your eyes—*and* ears too—before we've done with you. You should just hear the ragging that goes on whenever Bob's at home. Look here, this is what I want to know."

This time Lydia only looked interrogation. She despised Olive too thoroughly to care whether she laughed at her way of speaking or not, but she thought

that the sooner Olive satisfied her curiosity and went away the better.

"Do you like *fun?*" said Miss Senthoven, bringing her prominent brown eyes and head of untidy, flopping hair close to Lydia's face in her extreme eagerness for a reply.

Lydia, when she had recovered from her surprise at the form of the inquiry, assented, since assent was obviously expected of her, but she had grave doubts as to whether her own definition of "fun" would coincide with that of the Senthovens.

It did not.

"Fun" was synonymous with noise, and the most brilliant repartee known to any Senthoven was Bob's favourite form of squashing such "nonsense" as a comment on the blueness of the sky: "Well, you didn't expect to see it red, did you?"

Bob, a hobble-de-hoy of seventeen, short and thick-set, was his mother's idol. But there was "no nonsense" allowed from poor Aunt Evelyn by her terrible daughters.

"The mater's so mushy," they shouted disgustedly, when she made excuse, on the morning after Lydia's arrival, for Bob's very tardy appearance.

Lydia looked round the breakfast-table. She was quite well again now, and breakfast upstairs would have been unheard of. Beatrice was a still larger, taller, more athletic, and, if possible, noisier edition of Olive. She had just left school, and her dark hair, very thick and heavy, was piled into untidy heaps at the back of her head.

"No nonsense about *my* hair, I can tell you. Half the time I don't even look in the glass to see how I've done it," Beatrice would declare proudly.

The girls wore flannel shirts, with collars and ties, and short skirts that invariably contrived to be rather longer at the back than they were in the front.

They strenuously refused to make any change of toilette in the evenings, only substituting heelless strapped black shoes for their large and sturdy boots, over their thick-ribbed stockings.

Those evenings were the noisiest that Lydia had ever known.

Only Uncle Robert, small, and sallow, and spectacled, was silent.

He sat at the foot of the table, said a brief, muttered grace, and dispensed the soup.

"I say, what tommy-rot it is your not playing hockey, Lydie. Bee and I have got a match on to-morrow afternoon."

"Can't I come and watch you play?"

"I suppose so. *I* don't care if you do, I'm sure," Olive hastily repudiated the mere suggestion of such a dangerous approach to "nonsense" as was implied by a possible interest in another's movements.

"I say, I do believe Bob gets later every blessed day. A nice row there'd be if *we* came in late for every meal!"

"Too bally hungry to do that!"

"Your brother doesn't get much fresh air. You must remember he's in an office all day, and has two stuffy train journeys, poor boy," said Bob's mother unwisely.

"*Ow!* poor 'ickle sing, then—mammy's own baby-boy!" yelled Beatrice derisively.

"Mater!" said Olive, "how *can* you be so sloppy?"

Lydia looked round her, amazed. No one seemed to

think, however, that Beatrice and Olive were behaving otherwise than well and dutiful.

"Beef, Lydia?"

"Yes, please, Uncle Robert."

Lydia saw Beatrice wink at Olive, and Olive stuff a corner of her Japanese paper napkin into her mouth, as though to prevent an explosion of laughter. She only perceived that the jest lay in the manner of her own reply, when to the same inquiry her cousins successively answered, very loudly and curtly:

"Ra-*ther!*"

After the beef Aunt Evelyn helped the pudding. There were two dishes in front of her, one containing the remaining half of the pink mould that had figured on the dinner-table in the middle of the day, and the other the cold remnants of the previous night's tart.

And Lydia, invited to make her choice, replied very clearly and rather defiantly:

"I should like some tart, if you please, Aunt Evelyn."

Bob, who had made his entry with the second course, roared with laughter, and, reaching across his sister Beatrice, banged Lydia heavily on the back.

"That's right, Lady Clara Vere de Vere. You stick to it!"

Lydia, who hated being touched, jumped in her place, but she had the wit to guess that the surest way of making her cousins pursue any particular course of action would be to show that she disliked it, in which case they would instantly look upon her as "fair game." She did not in the least mind the series of witticisms, lasting the length of her visit, designed to emphasize what the Senthovens considered the affectations of her speech.

"Just the weeniest little tiny bit, if you will be so awf'ly kind, please. Thank you so awf'ly much."

Thus Beatrice, humorously.

And Bob:

"Well, perhaps—if you were to press me to a jelly——"

Lydia was not in the least amused at these sallies, but she laughed at them cheerfully enough. She felt immeasurably superior to the Senthovens, and had every intention of proving that superiority to them before the end of her stay.

At first blush, this did not appear to be any too easy. There was no doubt that the Senthovens, the girls especially, were efficient in their own line of action.

Beatrice was a renowned hockey captain; Olive had silver trophies from both the Golf Club and the Swimming Club, and both had won Junior Championships at lawn-tennis.

"Are you a good walker, old girl?" Beatrice one day inquired of Lydia.

This last term of endearment was a sign of the highest goodwill, and if employed too frequently would almost certainly lead to the accusation of sloppiness.

"Oh, yes," said Lydia, thinking of the school crocodile wending its decorous way the length of the Parade.

"Good. Olive's an awful rotter at walking. You and I can do some tramps together. Are you game for a six o'clock start to-morrow morning?"

Lydia laughed, really supposing the suggestion to be humorously intended.

"What are you cackling about? You're such an extraordinary kid; you always seem to laugh with your mouth shut. I suppose they taught you that at this precious school of yours, where you don't even play

hockey. Well, what about to-morrow? We can take some sort of fodder with us, but I've got to be back at the Common at ten sharp for a hockey practice."

Lydia was obliged to resign her pretensions. She hadn't understood quite what Beatrice meant by a "good walker."

"Anything up to twenty-five miles is my mark," said Beatrice complacently.

She and Olive were both good-humouredly contemptuous of Lydia's incapabilities, and Bob was even ready to show her how to serve at tennis, and how to throw a ball straight. Lydia was willing to be taught, and was sufficiently conscious that her tennis was improving rapidly, to submit to a good deal of shouting and slangy, good-humoured abuse.

She did not like it, but was philosophically aware that her stay at Wimbledon was drawing to a close, and that she would reap the benefit of improved tennis for ever afterwards.

"I suppose, being a duffer at games, that you're a regular Smart Aleck at lessons, aren't you?" Olive amiably asked her.

An assent would certainly be regarded as "bucking," but, on the other hand, Lydia had no mind to let her claims to distinction be passed over.

"I've just been in for an examination," she said boldly. "I might hear the result any day now."

"Get on! I thought you'd been ill."

"I've missed half the term at school, but I studied by myself, and I was up in time to go to the Town Hall for the exam. I had to go to bed again afterwards, though."

"Do you suppose you've got an earthly?" said Beatrice, in highly sceptical accents.

"Oh, I don't know. You see, I was the youngest competitor of all, as it happened."

Lydia had been very anxious to introduce this last piece of information, and it was plain that Beatrice and Olive were not altogether unimpressed by it.

Aunt Beryl had promised Lydia a telegram as soon as the results of the examination were put up in the Town Hall, and Lydia had already decided that in the event of failure, she should say nothing at all to the Senthovens. They would never remember to ask her about it. But if she had passed, she told herself grimly, they would have to acknowledge that they were not the only people who could succeed. Lydia reflected that she was sick of hearing how Olive had just saved a goal, and Beatrice had conducted her team to victory in yet another hockey match.

V

THE last of Lydia's Saturday afternoons at Wimbledon, however, was at length at hand.

"We might go and have some sort of a rag on the Common to-morrow for Lydia's last day. Sunday doesn't count," said Beatrice, on Friday evening after supper.

"Quite a good egg," agreed Olive. "Bob, are you game?"

Bob assented without enthusiasm. He was stretched at full length on the sofa, with his arms crossed underneath his head.

Uncle Robert was behind his newspaper as usual, and Aunt Evelyn was earnestly perusing a ladies' paper, from which she occasionally imparted to Lydia—the only person who made any pretence at listening to her—certain small items of information regarding personalities equally unknown to both of them.

This was Mrs. Senthoven's one relaxation, and afforded her an evident satisfaction.

"Fancy! It says here that, 'It is rumoured that a certain demoiselle of no inconsiderable charm, and well known to Society, is shortly to exchange her rank as peer's daughter for one even more exalted.' I wouldn't be surprised if that was Lady Rosalind Kelly that was meant. I suppose she's going to marry some duke. They say she's lovely, but I wouldn't care to see a son of *mine* marry her, after all the stories one's heard."

Aunt Evelyn looked fondly at the recumbent Bob.

"I say, we might get the Swaines to come with us to-morrow," said Olive, "then we could get up a rag of some sort."

"I say, old girl, chuck me my pipe. The mater won't mind."

"Get it yourself," retorted Olive, utterly without malice, but in the accepted Senthoven method of repudiating a request for any small service.

"Here's rather a good story about that fellow—you remember, Lydia, we saw his picture in the Sunday paper—Gerald Fitzgerald, who's acting in some play or other. Listen to this!"

Aunt Evelyn read aloud a reputed *mot* of the famous comedian that did not err upon the side of originality.

"I wonder if that's true, now!"

"Bee, chuck me my pipe," from Bob.

No Senthoven ever listened to any piece of information not directly bearing upon their own immediate personal interests.

"No fear! What a slacker you are, Bob! Why don't you get up off that sofa? Lydia's shocked at your ways."

"She's not!"

"She is!"

Lydia hoped that she showed her sense of superiority by contributing nothing to the discussion, which continued upon the simple lines of flat assertion and contradiction until Bob flung a cushion at his sister's head.

Beatrice thereupon hurled herself on him with a sort of howl.

"Don't make so much noise; you'll disturb father. Bee, you really are too old to romp so—your hair is nearly coming down."

It came quite down before Beatrice had finished pommelling her brother, and Uncle Robert had waked, and said that it was too bad that a man who'd been working hard all the week couldn't read the paper in peace and quiet for five minutes in his own house without being disturbed by all this horse-play.

Lydia watched her cousins, despised them very thoroughly indeed, and was more gratified than humiliated when Olive remarked:

"It's easy to see you've never been one of a large family, Lydia. You don't seem to understand what rotting means."

"I wonder you haven't got used to being chaffed at your school. It must be a sloppy sort of place."

"I daresay you'd think so," said Lydia calmly. "But then, you see, the girls there go in for work, not play."

"Oh, they go in for work, not play, do they?" mimicked Olive, but without much spirit, and as though conscious of her extreme poverty of repartee.

Lydia noticed, however, that both the Senthoven girls asked her frequent questions about her school, questions which she answered with all the assurance that she could muster.

That was something else to be remembered: it was better to assume that if your standards differ from those of your surroundings, it is by reason of their superiority.

Lydia lived up to her self-evolved philosophy gallantly, but she was in a minority, against a large majority that had, moreover, the advantage, incalculable in the period of adolescence, of a year or two's seniority.

She did not like the feeling of inferiority, painfully new to her.

At Regency Terrace she was the subject of ill-con-

cealed pride. Even Grandpapa, although he never praised, found no fault with her manners and bearing, and had lately admitted—no small compliment—that "Lyddie could manage Shamrock."

Uncle George discussed chemistry and botany with her seriously, and even allowed her opinion to carry weight in certain small questions of science, and Mr. Monteagle Almond always treated her like a grown person, and alluded respectfully to the rarity of finding a mathematical mind in a woman.

As to Aunt Beryl, in spite of the way in which she had lately usurped Lydia's recent rôle of invalid and acknowledged centre of general interest, Lydia knew very well that her own achievements and capabilities formed the chief theme of Aunt Beryl's every discourse with her friends. At school she was not only liked by her companions, but looked upon as the intellectual pride of the establishment.

No one at Miss Glover's bothered much about games, and, anyhow, Lydia's play at tennis was accounted amongst the best in the school.

It annoyed her to realize, as she most thoroughly did realize, that judged by the Senthoven standards, that best was very mediocre indeed.

She had never played golf, or hockey, or cricket, and her swimming consisted of slow and laborious strokes that grew very feeble, and came at very short intervals if she attempted to exceed a length of fifty yards.

Lydia's ambitions would never be athletic ones, and although she wished to be seen to advantage, she was far too shrewd to attempt any emulation of Beatrice and Olive and their friends upon their own ground. She only wished—and it seemed to her a highly rea-

sonable wish—to show them that, in other and greater issues, she, too, could count her triumphs.

She waited her opportunity with concealed annoyance at its tardiness in coming.

The Saturday afternoon picnic, ostensibly arranged in her honour, was such a form of entertainment as was least calculated to make Lydia enjoy herself.

It began with a noisy *rendezvous* between the Senthoven family and a tribe of male and female Swaines, ranging from all ages between eight and eighteen years old.

Most of the Swaines bestrode bicycles, upon which they balanced themselves whilst almost stationary with astonishing skill, and presently, amid many screams, a female Swaine took Olive and a picnic basket on the step of her machine, and departed with them in the direction of the Common. Bob and three junior Swaine brethren, also on bicycles, laid arms across one another's shoulders, and thus, taking up the whole width of the road, boldly invaded the tram lines, and Beatrice, with her contemporary Swaine and Lydia, started out on foot at a swinging pace.

"Give me *ekker*," said Beatrice contemptuously. "There's no ekker in biking that I can see."

Exercise, Lydia grimly reflected, they were certainly having in abundance. She and Beatrice held either handle of the large picnic hamper containing the Senthovens' contribution to the entertainment, and as it swung and rattled between them, Lydia made increased efforts to accommodate her steps to Beatrice's unfaltering stride.

"I s'pose," presently remarked Beatrice, with that aggressive accent that to a Senthoven merely represented the absence of affectation, "you'll be saying

presently that we've walked you off your legs. I never knew such a kid! Here, slack off a bit, Dot—she can't keep up."

"I can," said Lydia.

She had no breath left with which to make a long speech.

Both the elder girls burst out laughing.

"Come on then."

It was a scarlet-faced Lydia, with labouring chest, that eventually dropped on to the selected spot of Wimbledon Common, but she at least had the satisfaction of hearing her own name given in reply to Bob's derisive inquiry as to which of them had set the pace.

Yet another proof of the profound wisdom of Grandpapa who had said, "There's no such thing as *can't.*"

Grandpapa's theory, however, was less well exemplified in the impromptu cricket match that presently sprang up, in the sort of inevitable way in which a game that comprised the use of muscles and a ball invariably did spring up whenever the Senthovens were gathered together.

"I don't play cricket," Lydia haughtily observed to the least muscular-looking of the Swaine girls.

"Why not?" said her contemporary, looking very much astonished.

There was nothing for it but to put into words the humiliating admission:

"I don't know how to."

"How funny! But we'll soon teach you."

Lydia resigned herself, and since she was no more deficient in physical courage than is any other imaginative egotist, who sets the importance of cutting a

figure far above any incidental bodily risk that may be incurred in cutting in, she successfully avoided at least the appearance of running away from the ball.

The game, of course, was what was known to the Senthovens as "a rag" only, since with deficient numbers and a lack of implements, nothing so serious as a match could be comtemplated. Consequently, Lydia presently found herself with Bob's cricket bat tightly grasped in her unaccustomed hands.

She was not altogether displeased. It was only Olive who was bowling, and hitting the ball did not seem so very difficult. She might possibly distinguish herself even amongst these Philistines.

Lydia, in fact, was not above coveting the admiration of those whom she admittedly despised.

"Chuck you an easy one to start with," shouted Olive, good-naturedly.

Lydia jerked up the bat, but heard no reassuring contact with the slow moving ball.

"Don't spoon it up like that! You'd have been caught out for a dead cert if you had hit it!"

A second attempt was made.

"You *are* a duffer! Show her how to hold the bat, someone."

Lydia's third effort mysteriously succeeded in knocking down the improvised stumps behind her, whilst the ball, still unhit, was neatly caught by a nine-year-old Swaine child.

"Oh, I say, this is awfully slow!" remonstrated Bob.

"She's out now, anyway."

"Give her another chance," said Olive, "let her finish the over, anyway. There's no scoring, what's it matter?"



"Two more balls, then."

But there was only one more ball. Lydia, desperately determined to succeed once at least, exerted her whole strength miraculously, hit the ball fair and square, and knew a momentary triumph as it flew off the bat.

There was an ear-piercing shriek from Olive, and Lydia, terrified, saw her fling up both hands to her face and stagger round and round where she stood.

"Oh, I say, are you hurt, ole gurl?" came in anxious if rather obvious, inquiry from the surrounding field

"Got her bang on the jaw!"

"What awful rot, poor wretch."

They crowded round Olive, who was choking and gulping, her mouth streaming with blood, but undauntedly gasping:

"It's all right, don't fuss, I tell you, Bee, it's all right. I'll be all right in a sec. I never dreamt she was going to hit out like that. I ought to have caught it."

"Comes of having a mouth like a pound of live splits," said Bob, quite unconsciously making use of the strain of facetious personal incivility always used by him to any intimate, and all the while solicitously patting his sister on the back.

"Oh, *Olive,* I'm so sorry," said Lydia, far more acutely aware than anyone else was likely to be of the inadequacy of the time-worn formula.

"Don't be an ass," returned Olive crisply. "Lend me a nose wipe if you want to do something useful Mine's soaked."

Such of the assembly as were possessed of pocket handkerchiefs willingly sacrificed them, although the number contributed proved utterly inadequate to the

amount of blood lost by Olive, still determinedly making light of her injuries.

"Let's have a look and see if your teeth are all out, old gurl," urged Beatrice.

"I lost two last summer," the eldest Swaine remarked casually, "and Dot had one knocked out at hockey."

"The front one feels a bit loose," said Olive thoughtfully, and thrust a finger and thumb into a rapidly swelling mouth.

"Better not push it about," someone suggested; "why not sit down and have tea now?"

"You don't want to go home, do you, Ol?" Lydia heard Beatrice ask her sister aside.

"Good Lord, no. Don't let's have any *fuss*."

Olive could certainly not be accused of making the most of her distressing circumstances.

She gave Lydia a tremendous bang on the back, and said:

"Cheer up, old stupid! You jolly well don't pretend you can't hit out when you want to another time, that's all!"

After that she took her place amongst the others, and contrived to eat a great deal of bread-and-butter and several of the softer variety of cakes, in spite of the evident possibilities of a swelled and discoloured upper lip and badly bruised jaw.

"Old Olive has plenty of pluck—I will say that for her," Bob remarked to Lydia, who agreed with the more fervour that she was conscious of a quite involuntary sort of jealousy of Olive. It must be so much pleasanter to be the injured than the injurer, and to know that everyone was, at least inwardly, approving one's courage and powers of endurance.

When the picnic was over, Olive had quite a large

escort to accompany her home, all relating in loud and cheerful voices the various disabilities and disfigurements that had sooner or later overtaken them in the pursuit of athletic enjoyment.

"It's part of the fun," declared Olive herself. "I only hope the mater won't turn green at the sight of me. She's a bit squeamish sometimes."

"Hold your hand in front of your mouth."

"Keep your back to the light all you can."

But it became evident that none of these precautions would avail when Mrs. Senthoven was seen leaning over the gate, gazing down the road.

She waved a yellow envelope at them.

"Tellywag!" exclaimed Beatrice. "What on earth can it be?"

Telegrams were so rare in the Wimbledon establishment as to be looked upon with alarm.

She and Olive both began to run.

"It's addressed to you, Lydia," screamed Beatrice. "Come and open it. Come on, you people."

The last exhortation was in encouragement to the members of the Swaine family, delicately hanging back. At Beatrice's semaphore-like gesticulations of invitation, they all followed Lydia's rush forward, and as she opened her telegram she heard their loud babble uprise.

"Not so bad as it looks, is it, Ol?"

"She got a swipe on the jaw, and took it like a brick, too!"

"Oh, my dear girl!" from Aunt Evelyn. "Let me look this minute——"

"Don't fuss, mater. It's all right, really."

They were all pressing round the reluctant Olive.

Lydia looked up.

"No bad news, I hope, dear," said Aunt Evelyn, as was her invariable custom whenever present at the opening of a telegram.

"It's from Aunt Beryl about my examination," said Lydia very clearly.

She was so much excited that her tense, distinct utterance produced a sudden silence, and they all looked at her.

"Passed your examination first-class honours," read Lydia out loud.

"I *say!"*

"And you'd been ill the whole time, hadn't you? My golly!"

"Why, we thought you hadn't a chance!"

"Weren't you the youngest one there, or some rot of that kind?"

"First-class honours! That's as high as you can go, isn't it?"

They were all lavish of exclamations and hearty slangy congratulations.

Olive herself, and everybody else, had forgotten all about Olive's injury, and Lydia was the centre of attention.

"I say, let's have a celebration!" shouted Bob. "Come in after supper and have a cocoa-rag."

The invitation was accepted with loud enthusiasm.

"You can have the dining-room, dears," said Aunt Evelyn, "only not too much noise, because of father. I'll explain it to him, and get him to sit in the drawing-room."

Uncle Robert never took part in any festivity of his family's. It was supposed that he needed peace and solitude after his day's work, and in summer he pottered about the little green-house, and at other

times of the year dozed behind the newspaper, unmolested. Nevertheless, Uncle Robert, to Lydia's astonishment and gratification, actually came out of his taciturnity that evening at supper-time in order to pay tribute to her achievement.

"Fancy the pater waking up like that!" ejaculated Bob afterwards. "More than he's ever done for any of us."

"A fat lot of exams. we've ever passed!" said Beatrice scornfully.

It was true that no Senthoven had ever attained to any such distinction, and Lydia realized with the more surprise that for this very reason they regarded her success as something nearly approaching to the miraculous.

Almost against her own will, she was struck with Olive's unfeigned relief at having the general attention distracted from herself and her accident, and focussed instead upon her cousin's triumph.

Lydia half admired and half despised Olive, and most wholly and thoroughly enjoyed the novel sensation of being for once of high account in the eyes of the Wimbledon household.

Certainly towards the end of the exceedingly rowdy "celebration," the cause of it was rather lost sight of in the fumes of unlimited cocoa, the shrieking giggles of the younger Swaine children, and the uproarious mirth of their seniors, the whole-hearted amusement, that almost seemed as though it would never be stayed, at so exquisitely numorous an accident as the collapse of Bob's chair beneath him.

Nevertheless, the celebration was all in Lydia's honour, and her health was drunk in very hot, very thick cocoa, with a great deal of coarse brown sedi-

ment at the bottom of each cup, afterwards scraped up into a spoon, and forcibly administered to the youngest child present, who had rashly declared a liking for "grounds."

Lydia, highly excited, for once made as much noise as anybody, and began to feel that she should be quite sorry to say good-bye to them all on Monday.

But she was much too clear-sighted in the analysis of her own situations to delude herself into supposing that a prolongation of her stay at Wimbledon would result in anything but failure.

One could not pass an examination with brilliancy every day, and once the first sensation over—which it speedily would be—the old routine of walks and hockey and "ragging" would go on as before, and Lydia could no longer hope for anything but, at best, a negative obscurity. Far better to leave them before any of their gratifying enthusiasm had had time to die down.

She could tell, by the very nature of their farewells, the immense difference that now obtained in their estimation of her importance.

"You must go on as well as you've begun, Lydia. It's a great thing for a girl to be clever," said Aunt Evelyn rather wistfully. "I suppose you'll want to take up teaching, later on?"

"Perhaps. I'm not quite sure yet."

Lydia had long ago given up talking about her childish ambition to write books, although it was stronger than ever within her.

"Well, there's time to settle yet. You're not sixteen, and there's no hurry. I'm sure Grandpapa and Aunt Beryl would miss you dreadfully if you thought of

going away anywhere. It would be best if you could get something to do down there, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, Aunt Evelyn," said Lydia amiably. She always listened to older people politely and agreed with what they said, but their advice had no disturbing effect upon her, because it never seriously occurred to her that anyone could be a better judge of her own interests than she was herself.

Even Uncle Robert, hastily saying good-bye before starting for the office, found time to say to her:

"Well, good-bye, child. Don't overwork yourself with all this examination stuff. You can come down here if you want a change any time. Settle it with your aunt."

"Better come down for the Christmas hols. We can show you some tobogganing then, most likely. I got some whopping great bruises on my legs last year," was the inducement held out by Olive. "I must be off to that beastly old holiday task now, I suppose. I always put it off to the last minute. Wish I was a stew-pot like you."

Beatrice and Bob escorted Lydia to the station.

"Well, ta-ta, and be a good girl," said Bob patronizingly, tilting his hat rather far back on his head and smoking a cigarette that aggressively protruded from the extreme corner of his mouth, "when's the old man going to have the decency to remember my existence? You've cut us all out with him with your blooming book-work. He goes in for being a bit of a brainy old bird himself, doesn't he?"

Inured though she might be to the Senthoven vocabulary, Lydia nearly shuddered visibly at the thought of Grandpapa, had he heard his descendant's description of him.

"Shut up, you ass," said Beatrice, in an automatic sort of way. "Well, bye-bye, ole gurl. You've fixed it up with the mater about popping down again some time, I s'pose. Just come and take us as you find us, as the saying goes. Here's your train."

Lydia, leaning from the window of the third-class railway carriage, wondered whether to shake hands with Beatrice or not. The law of "No nonsense about *us*" would certainly preclude kissing, even had she felt the slightest desire to embrace her rough-haired, freckle-faced cousin, shifting from one leg to the other, her red hands thrust into the pockets of her woollen coat, and her tam o' shanter pulled well down over one eye.

Bob was already casting glances in the direction of the refreshment room.

"Good-bye," said Lydia, definitely deciding against putting out her hand. "And thanks so much."

"Good heavens! Don't start speechifying, whatever you do," cried the Senthovens in protesting horror, both at the same moment, and as nearly as possible in the same words.

So Lydia was obliged to have recourse to that most uncomfortable form of ejaculatory conversation that appears to be incumbent upon all those who are unfortunate enough to be accompanied by their friends to the railway station.

"Nearly off now, I think."

"Oh, yes, there's the whistle."

"Well, I suppose Aunt Beryl will expect us to send our love, or some rot of that kind."

"All right. I think we really *are* starting this time."

We were not, however, and Lydia looked dumbly at

her waiting cousins and wondered why, since they had nothing more to say, and were obviously quite as ill at ease as she was herself, they did not go.

"I wish you wouldn't wait. We shall be off in a minute now."

"Oh, it's all right."

Beatrice shifted her weight on to the other leg, and Bob pulled out a packet of Woodbine cigarettes and lit one of them.

"I hope Grandpapa will be in good form," said Bob desperately.

"I'll tell him you asked."

"Oh, don't bother."

"He knows there isn't any nonsense about *us*," said Beatrice.

To this last familiar refrain, the train actually began to move out of the station at last. Lydia waved her hand once or twice, received curt nods in reply, and sank back with a feeling of relief on to her seat.

The end of the Senthovens.

She could not help feeling glad that her visit was over.

The familiar quiet of Regency Terrace awaited her now. Aunt Beryl, as her letters had assured Lydia, once more returned to the unobtrusive rôle out of which her illness had momentarily forced her into unsuitable lime-light. Uncle George, certain to be full of quiet pride in the result of the examination, even Mr. Monteagle Almond, next Wednesday, probably framing elaborate little congratulatory sentences.

Lydia looked forward intensely to it all.

She wondered how Grandpapa would receive her, and mentally conned over the amusing descriptions that she would give him in private of the Senthoven

ménage, treading upon his well-known prejudice against that slang in the use of which it was so proficient.

She did not expect to be met at the station, but sent her luggage by the omnibus, and herself walked to Regency Terrace by the short cut, remembering as she did so her arrival, more than three years ago, under the care of both aunts, and full of uncertainty as to her own eventual destination.

Security, reflected Lydia maturely, was the most important thing of all. One was secure where one was appreciated, and held to be of importance.

She remembered that it was upon her own representations that Grandpapa had consented—going against his own prejudice to do so—to her being sent to school. It had been a great success, as even Grandpapa must have long ago acknowledged to himself.

Perhaps one day he might even acknowledge it to her.

Lydia smiled to herself over the improbability of the suggestion.

Then she turned the corner into Regency Terrace and saw the familiar house on the opposite side of the road.

As she caught sight of it, the hall-door opened, and Aunt Beryl, in her well-known blue foulard dress with white spots, that she generally only wore on Sundays, looked out. At the same instant Lydia saw Grandpapa peering from the dining-room window, which was already open, and raising his stick a few inches in the air to shake it in welcome.

All in honour of the great examination victory!

Lydia waved her hand excitedly, and at the same moment, with ear-piercing barks, Shamrock shot out



from behind Aunt Beryl, trailing a significant length of broken chain behind him, and raced madly down the road towards her.

Lydia, breaking into quick, irrepressible laughter, dashed across the road and up the steps, in sudden, acute happiness at so vivid a realization of her dreams of home-coming.

VI

TIME slipped by with mysterious rapidity.

Lydia was in the sixth form—she was a prefect—she was Head of the School.

At seventeen she discovered that she had ceased to grow. She had attained to her full height, and after all, it was not the outrageous stature that had been prophesied for her. Only five feet eight inches, and her slimness, and the smallness of her bones, made her look less tall.

Her thick, brown hair was in one plait now, doubled under and tied with a black ribbon, and her skirts reached down to her slender ankles.

Lydia still had doubts as to her own claims to beauty, and envied Nathalie Palmer her bright, Devonshire complexion and blue eyes.

"Should you say I was *at all* pretty, Nathalie?"

"Your eyes are lovely."

"That's what people always say about plain girls," said Lydia disgustedly.

"You look sort of foreign, and interesting," said Nathalie thoughtfully. "The shape of your face is quite different to anyone else's."

It did not sound reassuring, and Lydia touched with the tips of her fingers the salient cheek bones that gave an odd hint of Mongolianism to her small olive-hued face.

"Your mouth is pretty, it's so red," said Nathalie. "Though I should like it better if your teeth didn't slope inwards."

Nathalie adored Lydia, but she was incurably honest.

She went home for good the year before Lydia was to enter upon her last term at Miss Glover's.

"You'll come and stay with us next year, won't you?" entreated Nathalie. "There's no one but father and me at home, but quite a lot of nice people live near."

"Of course I'll come. I'd love to come. I should just have left here," said Lydia.

She wondered whether Nathalie realized that on leaving school she would be seeking for employment. Most of Miss Glover's pupils had their homes in the locality, and went as a matter of course "to help father in the shop." Several found situations as teachers, one had gone to Bristol University to study for a medical degree, and only a minority, like Nathalie herself, looked forward to living at home.

Lydia knew that she meant to write, and she had long ago told Nathalie the secret of her ambitions, but she had said nothing about other work, and the two girls parted without having broached the subject.

"It will be time enough to tell Nathalie when I know what I'm going to do," reflected Lydia, with characteristic caution.

She was sure that Aunt Beryl expected her to teach. Miss Glover herself had hinted that a post as Junior Mistress might be available in a year's time to one of Lydia's abilities. That would mean sleeping at home, having long holidays in the summer, and lesser ones at Christmas and Easter, and a salary as well as her midday dinner at school.

It might also mean a Senior Mistress-ship after a certain number of years, an increase of salary, and the

far-away, ultimate possibility of partnership with the Head. And it would also mean an endless succession of pupils, almost all local, a life spent among femininity until her interests would all centre round numbers of her own sex, and a narrowing of vision such as must be inevitable in a mind exclusively engaged in intercourse with the half-developed faculties of youth.

Lydia wished to leave the little seaside town.

Regency Terrace should be her home; she wanted to come back there for holidays, and to receive the proud welcome that had awaited her after her visit to Wimbledon, when she had passed her examination with first-class honours.

But her secret determination was to find work in London. Only in London, thought Lydia, would her vaunted capabilities be put to the test. Only there could she hope to come into contact with that strata of life, somehow different to the one in which Aunt Beryl, or the Jacksons, or the Senthovens moved, and to which, she felt inwardly certain, she herself would be acclaimed instantly as by right divine. Finally, only in the immensities of London did Lydia think that she would gain the experience necessary for the fulfilment of her desire to write.

Hitherto her keen critical faculty had left her exceedingly dissatisfied with her own literary attempts.

Once at sixteen years old, she had entered a competition started by a girl's paper for a short story "dealing with animal life." Lydia had first of all written a long and exciting account of a runaway elephant in the jungle in India, with a little English boy—chota-sahib—on its back.

Aunt Beryl's praises, which had been enthusiastic, had failed to satisfy her, owing, Lydia supposed, to

her own intimate conviction of Aunt Beryl's lack of discrimination.

But she had disconcertingly found that it would be utterly impossible to submit the story to Grandpapa's discerning ear and incisive judgment.

Why?

Lydia, disregarding a certain violent inclination to shelve the whole question, had ruthlessly analyzed her feelings of discomfort at the very idea of hearing Grandpapa's comments upon her work. There was no doubt of it—Grandpapa would say that Lydia knew nothing about India, or runaway elephants, or chota-sahibs—she had suddenly writhed, remembering the very book of travels in which she first met with that expression—that her story was all written at second or third hand, and was therefore worthless. With a courage that afterwards struck her as surprising, Lydia had envisaged the horrid truth.

She had lacked the heart to destroy the runaway elephant altogether, but had stuffed the manuscript out of sight into the back of her writing-table drawer, and resolutely sat down to consider whether she could not lay claim to any first-hand impressions of animal life.

The result had been a short, humorously written sketch of one of Shamrock's innumerable escapades.

Lydia had not been awarded the first prize, as she inwardly felt would have been in accordance with the dramatic fitness of things, but she had thoroughly amused Grandpapa by reading the sketch to him aloud, and she had taught herself a valuable lesson.

Experience, she had decided sweepingly, was the only royal road to literature. She would write no more until experience was hers.

Experience, however, to Lydia's way of thinking,

was not to be gained by remaining at Regency Terrace for ever.

When the last of her school days was approaching rapidly, she decided that the time had come to speak.

"Grandpapa, I should like to ask your advice."

"Light the gas, my dear. Your aunt is very late out this afternoon," was Grandpapa's only reply.

When Grandpapa simulated deafness, it always meant that he was displeased.

Lydia obediently struck a match, and the gas, through its crinkly pink globe, threw a sudden spurt of light all over the familiar dining-room.

Grandpapa leant stiffly back in his arm-chair, a tiny, waxen-looking figure, with alert eyes that seemed oddly youthful and mischievous, seen above his knotted hands and shrunken limbs. He could see and hear whatever he pleased, but it was becoming more and more difficult for him to move, although he still staunchly refused to be helped from his chair.

"Lyddie, where's Shamrock?"

Useless to reply, as was in fact the case, "I don't know." The futility of such a reply was bound to call forth one of Grandpapa's most disconcerting sarcasms.

"I'll find out, Grandpapa."

Luck favoured Lydia.

As a rule, one might as well attempt to follow the course of a comet as that of Shamrock's illicit excursions. But on this occasion Lydia at once found him in the hall, and was so much relieved at the prospect of success with Shamrock's owner, that she failed to take notice of the stealthy manner of Shamrock's approach, denoting a distinct consciousness of wrong-doing.

"Good little dog!" said Grandpapa delightedly.

"They talk a great deal of nonsense about his sneaking off into the town and stealing from the shops—I don't believe a word of it! He's always here when *I* want him."

At which Shamrock fawned enthusiastically upon his master, and Lydia determined the hour to be a propitious one, and began again:

"Will you give me your advice, Grandpapa?"

"Lyddie, you said that a little while ago," said Grandpapa severely. "It's a foolish feminine way of speaking, and I thought you had more sense."

Lydia looked at her disconcerting grandparent in silence.

She knew herself far better able to steer clear of his many and violent prejudices than was matter-of-fact Uncle George, or unfortunate Aunt Beryl, who often seemed to go out of her way in order to fall foul of them. But this time she was conscious of perplexity.

"I don't understand, Grandpapa. I really *do* want your advice."

"Advice is cheap," said Grandpapa. "A great many people say they want it, especially women. What they really want, Lyddie, is an opportunity for telling someone what they have already decided to do. Then they can say afterwards 'Oh, but so-and-so and I talked it *all* over and he advised me to do such-and-such.' You mark my word, no one ever yet asked advice whose mind wasn't more or less made up already."

To take the bull by the horns was always the best way of dealing with Grandpapa.

Lydia said resolutely:

"Well, I haven't yet made up my mind, Grandpapa, that's why I want to talk to you."

"So that I can advise you to do whatever you want to do?" satirically demanded Grandpapa. "Well, my dear, you know me well enough to know that I shan't do *that*. Talk away."

Thus encouraged, Lydia began.

"I am seventeen, Grandpapa."

She pretended not to hear Grandpapa's cheerful ejaculation, "Only seventeen, my dear? Quite a young child, then."

"I shall be eighteen by the time I leave school next month, and there'll be my future to think about. I know Miss Glover means to give me a chance of a Junior Mistress-ship, or I suppose I could get a post as governess, as Aunt Beryl is always suggesting. It would be a pity to waste all my education at dress-making, or anything like that, though I suppose I *could* take up something of the sort. Only really I feel as though I'd rather use my head than my hands. Of course, I like anything to do with figures, and Mr. Almond seemed to think that I shouldn't have any difficulty in getting into the Bank here."

She paused.

"Well," said Grandpapa, "you've told me all the things you *don't* mean to do. Now tell me what you've really decided."

Lydia, although rather angry, could not help laughing outright, and immediately felt that her laughter had done herself and her cause more good than any amount of eloquence. Eloquence indeed was invariably wasted upon Grandpapa, who preferred any good speaking that might take place to be done by himself.

"Now, child, have done with this nonsense and speak out. What is it you want?"

Lydia drew a long breath.

"To go and work in London."

There was a long pause, and then Grandpapa said in rather a flat voice:

"So that's it, is it? Well, well, well—who'd have thought it?"

"Grandpapa! you didn't think I should stay here *always?*" protested Lydia. "How am I ever to get any experience, in one place all the time, never seeing any new people?"

" 'Never' is a long day," quoth Grandpapa.

"But I shall have to begin soon if I'm to work at all. You and Aunt Beryl have always said that I must do something when I leave school."

"And supposing I said now that things have looked up a little, and you could live at home and help your aunt a bit, and take little Shamrock out of a morning. Eh, Lyddie, what then?"

Lydia was silent, but she did not attempt to conceal that her face fell at the suggestion.

"Well, well, well," said Grandpapa again, "so it's to be London!"

"Then you'll let me go," Lydia exclaimed, trying to keep the eagerness out of her voice.

Grandpapa uttered one of his most disagreeable, croaking laughs.

"Don't talk like a little fool, my dear! You know very well that if you want to go, you'll go. How can I prevent it? I am only an old man."

Lydia was disconcerted. Grandpapa never spoke of himself as old, and the hint of pathos in the admission, unintentional though she supposed it to be, seemed to her out of place in the present juncture.

She grew more annoyed as the evening wore on, for Grandpapa was really very tiresome.

"A useless old man, that's what I am," he soliloquized, taking care, however, to make himself perfectly audible.

"What is the matter, Grandpapa?" said the much surprised Aunt Beryl.

Everyone knew how angry Grandpapa would have been had he suspected anyone else of looking upon him as a useless old man.

"Anno Domini," sighed Grandpapa melodramatically, "Anno Domini! No one left but little Shamrock to keep the old man company."

"Grandpapa!" cried Aunt Beryl indignantly, "I'm sure if you had to depend on the dog for company, you *might* complain. But you know very well that isn't the case. Why, here's George only too ready to have a game of Halma, if you want to. Or Lydia could read out to you for a bit."

"Lyddie's off to London, my dear," sighed Grandpapa in martyred accents, for all the world, thought Lydia indignantly, as though she meant to start off by the next train.

"What?"

But Grandpapa, having dropped his bomb amongst them, not unwisely elected to leave it there without waiting to see its effect.

"I shall go up to bed now, my boy. Will you give me an arm?"

"But it's quite early. Don't you feel well, Grandpapa? And what's all this about Lydia going away?"

Aunt Beryl received no answer.

Lydia was too much vexed and too much embarrassed to make any attempt at stating her case, and Grandpapa had begun the tense process of hoisting himself out of his arm-chair. When he was on his feet

at last, he allowed Uncle George to come and assist him out of the room and up the stairs.

"Good night all," said Grandpapa in a sorrowful, impersonal sort of way, as he hobbled out of the room on his son's arm. "I am getting to be an old fellow now—I can't afford to keep late hours. Bed and gruel, that's all that's left for the old man."

Aunt Beryl looked at Lydia with dismay.

"What's all this about? Grandpapa hasn't been like this since he was so vexed that time when Uncle George took Shamrock out and lost him, and he was away three days before a policeman brought him back. I remember Grandpapa going on in just the same way then, talking about being an old man and nobody caring for him. Such nonsense!"

Lydia had seldom heard so much indignation expressed by her quiet aunt, and for a moment she hoped that attention might be diverted from her own share in the disturbance of Grandpapa's serenity.

But an early recollection of the unfortunate effects upon Aunt Beryl of her withheld confidence, five years previously, came to her mind. Lydia considered the position quietly for a few moments, and then decided upon her line of attack.

"I know you'll understand much better than Grandpapa did, and help me with him," she began.

Not for nothing had the child Lydia learnt the necessity for diplomacy in dealing with those arbitrary controllers of Destiny called grown-up people.

Aunt Beryl seemed a good deal startled, and perhaps rather disappointed, which Lydia indulgently told herself was natural enough, but the subtle appeal to range herself with her niece against Grandpapa's overdone pretensions was not without its effect.

And Lydia found an unexpected ally in Uncle George, when her scheme had presently reached the stage of family discussion.

"You ought to get a good post enough," he said judicially, "but you mustn't expect to keep yourself all at once unless you 'live in' somewhere?"

"If she goes to London at all," Aunt Beryl said firmly, "she must go to Maria Nettleship."

Of course. Maria Nettleship, the *amie d'enfance* of Aunt Beryl's younger days, who still punctually exchanged letters with her, and was successfully managing a boarding-house in Bloomsbury.

"I should be happier about her with Maria Nettleship than if she was just 'living in' with goodness knows whom to keep her company. And it's *nicer,* too, for a young girl like Lydia—you know what I mean," said Aunt Beryl mysteriously.

"But a boarding-house is expensive. I never thought of anything like that, auntie. Why, I should cost you more than I would if I lived at home, a great deal," said Lydia, aghast.

"Oh, I could easily make an arrangement with Maria Nettleship. And you want the chance, Lydia, my dear. I'm sure I don't blame you. It's not a good thing to stay in one place all one's life long, I suppose." Aunt Beryl gave a sigh. "It would be just an experiment for a little while, and I'm sure the expense isn't to be thought of when we know you would be paying it all back in a year or two."

"If it's simply a question of the ready," said Uncle George solemnly, "I can lay my hand on something at the minute. A bachelor has few expenses, and except for the little I make over to the house, I can put by a tidy little bit every year. I should look upon it as

quite a profitable investment, Lydia, I assure you, to provide the needful on this occasion."

"Oh, Uncle George—thank you very much. But haven't I any money at all of my own without having to take yours?" cried Lydia, distressed.

Uncle George shook his head.

"Your poor mother was very unwise in the management of her affairs—very unwise indeed. There's a matter of twenty or twenty-five pounds coming to you every year, Lydia, and that's about all."

"Did that pay for my being sent to school?"

"There was a little money of your father's, that he left to me," said Aunt Beryl hastily. "I was always his favourite sister, whatever Evelyn may say, and it seemed only natural that his child should have the benefit of it, I'm sure. Now leave that, my dear, and tell me what sort of work you think of looking out for in town."

"Certainly," said Uncle George, "that must be all cut and dried before you think of starting off."

Lydia felt almost bewildered by the rapidity with which things appeared to be settling themselves. A boarding-house in London, independent work, and leisure and opportunity for the writing that was to bring her fame and money! She remembered once more, and this time with triumph, Grandpapa's old assertion: "There's no such thing as *can't.*"

Lydia's determination to succeed, product partly of an ambitious and resolute character, and partly of sheer ignorance as to the difficulties that might lie in wait for her, was enhanced by an ardent desire to justify the astonishingly practical belief in her that Aunt Beryl and Uncle George were displaying.

Uncle George, who was not at all in the habit of paying compliments, even said to her:

"I must say, it isn't every girl who would have the courage to start life as you're proposing to do, Lydia, and you deserve every success, I'm sure."

After this, it was a disagreeable shock to find that another, and entirely opposite, point of view could be taken of her venture.

One Wednesday evening, to Lydia's infinite surprise, silent, dried-up little Mr. Monteagle Almond suddenly broached the subject. He chose his opportunity with evident care. Grandpapa, who still elected to maintain his pose of rapidly-approaching dissolution, had waited until the first game of chess was in full swing, and then demanded plaintively if his son was too busy amusing himself to give the poor old man an arm upstairs.

"Excuse me one moment, Monty."

Uncle George had departed dutifully.

Almost at the same moment the maid Gertrude had put her head round the door, the rest of her remaining outside the room, after the fashion most deplored by Miss Raymond, and given breathless utterance:

"Oh, miss! Could you come out a minute, please? Shamrock's got his head squeezed in between the railings at the back, and I can't get him out, and he's howling something awful!"

"That dog!"

Permitting herself only this forbearing exclamation, Aunt Beryl also had hastened away.

Mr. Monteagle Almond remained seated before the chess-table, sedulously tracing a little imaginary pattern on the board with one long yellow forefinger.

Lydia was seated under the gas, which she had

turned up as high as it would go, absorbed in finishing a Sunday blouse for herself.

"I am sorry to hear of your projected departure, Miss Lydia," suddenly said Mr. Monteagle Almond. "Quite a break-up of the home circle."

"Oh, no!" protested Lydia, who would have been more deeply concerned at this fashion of viewing her going if she had not been accustomed to Mr. Almond's sententious phraseology on every occasion. "Besides, I'm not going yet. It's only a plan for next winter perhaps. I shan't leave school until the end of this term."

Mr. Almond shook his head.

"A great wrench for old Mr. Raymond no doubt, and he seems to me to be breaking up. To-night, for instance, he was quite tremulous. I was sorry to see that."

"So was I," muttered Lydia rather viciously. It was really too bad of Grandpapa to put on those airs that would take in anyone who did not know all of which he was capable.

"The old are perhaps less apt at concealing their feelings than we younger folk," pursued Mr. Almond. "Now, I'm sure my good friends, your aunt and uncle, have not allowed you to see how deeply your decision will affect them."

"They've been very kind," said Lydia with emphasis. She was anxious that no one should think her ungrateful.

"I have no doubt of it at all—none whatever. A most kind-hearted fellow is George—most kind-hearted. And as for Miss Raymond—well, I need not tell you what she is. I am sure that you remember her devoted nursing of you—for which she afterwards suffered so

severely—on the occasion of some childish ailment of yours a couple of years ago."

Mr. Almond fixed an eye of melancholy severity upon Lydia, looking as though he were much less sure than he alleged himself to be of her remembering the occasion in question, and was consequently determined to recall it to her memory.

Lydia was speechless with indignation.

Pneumonia a childish ailment!

One of the chief crises of her youth to be recalled merely as the setting for the jewel of Aunt Beryl's self-devotion!

Mr. Almond was worse than Grandpapa even.

It was clear to her that here was a point of view which required readjustment.

"I shall be very, very sorry to leave home," she said earnestly. "But indeed I do think it's the best thing I can do. If I get a good post in London, it will lead to much more than my just going on at Miss Glover's, teaching, for ever. And it seems a shame not to make the very most of the education I've had."

"Very true. But I'm afraid you'll be sadly missed. One had hoped, if I may say so without offence, to see you taking your aunt's place in time. She has been very much tied now for a number of years."

"I *do* hope to help Aunt Beryl. But it would be a disappointment to her and to Uncle George if I didn't do something with the education they've given me. In some ways," said Lydia, "the thought of going to London by myself frightens me—but honestly, Mr. Almond, I believe if I once take the plunge, it'll turn out to be the best and most profitable for us all in the long run."

She saw by his face, with decided relief, that the little man was becoming mollified.

"I'm glad you look at it in that light. You'll excuse me speaking like this, I hope, but I'll admit to you, Miss Lydia, that at first I was inclined to think you might be going into this without much thought for anyone but yourself. What you've just said shows me that I may have misjudged you."

"Indeed," Lydia said deferentially, "I know it's only from friendship that you're saying it at all. But I hope you'll believe that I really am not ungrateful to them all—and I do want to make them proud of me. I hope I shall, too, if I have my chance."

The middle-aged bank clerk looked at her with a gaze that seemed half admiring and half envious.

"Well," he said slowly, "they're giving you your chance all right, Miss Lydia. And I hope, if I may say so, that you'll make the most of it, both for your own sake and for theirs."

And Lydia, whilst agreeing with him in all sincerity, felt with an odd sense of triumph that she had reinstated herself in the good opinion of the loyal friend of the family.

This opinion received a startling confirmation the next time that she saw him.

"Have you decided upon the exact nature of your employment in London?" he inquired of her, with an air of caution.

"Oh, no. I don't very much care for the idea of teaching, and I should have to learn shorthand and typewriting before I could get secretarial work. What I should really like would be something to do with figures—accountancy perhaps."

"Ah! I thought so. The mathematical mind! A

very rare thing in your sex," said Mr. Monteagle Almond, as he had frequently said before. "But subject to the approval of your good aunt, I have here something that may interest you, I think."

Aunt Beryl and Lydia gazed eagerly at the paper he held out to them, covered with telegraphic notes written in Mr. Almond's neat little clerkly hand.

"New venture. *Robes et Modes.* Started last year. Establishment owned by Lady Proprietress, personally known to informant. Prem. in West End already acquired and cap. assured."

"Opening for educ. young lady; a/cs and help in sales-room when required."

"Live out; midday meal in. Special feature made of employees' welfare."

"Personal interview previous to engagt. Probably Sept. Salary to begin—no premium."

"Only superior young ladies considered."

"The last item," said Mr. Almond solemnly, "was much dwelt upon by my informant—Griswell, of the N. S. Bank. He could give me very few details, but seeing that I was interested, he immediately offered to communicate with the lady concerned, a personal friend of his. He merely mentioned her name to me by chance, and was quite surprised at my taking him up, like."

"It was very kind of you to pass it on, I'm sure," said Aunt Beryl excitedly. "What do you say about it, Lydia?"

"I should like, if Mr. Almond will be so very kind, to hear all about it," said Lydia, her eyes shining and her heart full of excitement.

VII

"WELL, Lyddie, I hope you'll find enjoyment in trimming bonnets for fine ladies," said Grandpapa caustically.

"She's to keep the accounts, Grandpapa," Aunt Beryl repeated in loud, displeased accents. "Nothing to do with the millinery, naturally."

"I'm not so sure of that—not so sure of that. What did the old party say about helping in the shop?"

"Madame Ribeiro only asked if Lydia would be willing to give a hand at sale-time, or anything like that, and of course she agreed. It's her book-keeping they want."

"And who is Madame Ribeiro?"

"Oh, Grandpapa!" cried Lydia reproachfully, "you know very well that Aunt Beryl and I went up to town this morning on purpose to see her. She's the old lady who owns the shop, and wants to run it on new lines. Why, she's a sort of lady, isn't she, Aunt Beryl?"

"It's a foreign name," was the indirect, but distrustful, reply of Aunt Beryl. "I didn't like to ask her what country she belonged to, quite. Is it a French name?"

"Portuguese," said Grandpapa unexpectedly. "There are Ribeiros all over the Dutch East Indies."

"She seemed a nice person enough—older than I expected, and dressed very quietly in black, like a widow. She certainly had a moustache, but then some of those very dark foreigners *are* like that, and I'm sure

it's her misfortune, and not her fault, poor thing—like her stoutness."

"She talked very, very slowly, and with an accent," Lydia said. "She never smiled once, either—I never saw such a solemn face, and enormous black eyes. But I think I should like her."

"But it's she that's got to like you," Grandpapa pointed out. "You've got to work at the bonnets under her, haven't you, Lyddie?"

"Not exactly under her. She doesn't come to the shop herself, much—someone she calls Madame Elena is in charge there. Madame Ribeiro lives in her own house, in St. John's Wood. But the shop is hers, and she engages all the helpers herself. She sees them all personally."

"And is this precious shop in St. John's Wood, too?"

"Certainly not. It's in the West End," said Aunt Beryl with dignity.

"Then I suppose Lyddie would like a little house in Park Lane, so as to be near it?" Grandpapa inquired with an air of simplicity.

"I thought I told you that Lydia was going to Maria Nettleship's," said Aunt Beryl stiffly.

"I wish we'd had time to go and see Miss Nettleship," cried Lydia, hastily turning the conversation.

She did not in the least mind Grandpapa's sarcasms herself—in fact, she was rather amused by them—but they always greatly discomposed Aunt Beryl.

But when a definite offer had been made by letter and accepted, and it was decided that Lydia was to go, much sooner than they had expected, to London, and work at the accountancy in the shop that old

Madame Ribeiro called "Elena's," she determined to have some sort of an explanation with Grandpapa.

It worried her very much to see that he regarded this first step in her career as a mere wilful, childish freak, and something of a personal injury to himself.

The spirit of Uncle George and Aunt Beryl was a very different one. They praised her courage and determination in starting out into the world by herself, and were full of pride in the letters so willingly supplied by Miss Glover and Dr. Young, and the clergyman who had prepared Lydia for confirmation, all setting forth her cleverness, and her steady ways and the achievements that lay to her credit in scholarship. They were proud of her for having obtained so quickly a post at a salary of a pound a week to begin with, and her midday dinner and tea five times a week—which practically brought it up to twenty-five shillings a week, Uncle George pointed out. They would only allow her to pay half of the weekly salary to Miss Nettleship. The rest—an additional ten shillings—Uncle George insisted that he should remit to Lydia by postal order every Friday.

"That will leave you something for 'bus fares, and dress expenses," he said. "And I shouldn't like you to touch your own income, child. Let that accumulate for a rainy day."

"You can't hope to save much at first, you know," said Aunt Beryl. "But you're well off for clothes, and won't want anything new except the black dress they said you'd need, and I can make over the old *broche* easily enough. It's beautiful stuff—you'll only have to get the cambric for the neck and sleeves. It's a great help to a girl when she can do her own dressmaking."

They could think of nothing but Lydia.

Mr. Monteagle Almond himself, who had procured this fine chance for her, was hardly given any credit by Lydia's uncle and aunt. They ascribed it all to her own merits.

Lydia quite longed to justify all this faith in her, and to repay Uncle George and Aunt Beryl for their sacrifice. But she did not really feel much doubt of being able to do so eventually.

This made Grandpapa's attitude the more vexatious.

"I shall be able to come home for Christmas, you know, Grandpapa," she said one day.

"Where are we now—August? And they want you to begin at the end of this month?"

"That's so that I shall get used to the work before the rush begins. The end of August is the slackest time in London," Lydia explained, and the next minute was vexed with herself, as Grandpapa remarked meekly: "Is it indeed, now? Thank 'ee, my dear, for telling me that."

"I hope I'm going to make a success of it, and make you all proud of me," said Lydia with determination. "You know, Grandpapa, in the evenings I am going to begin writing. Do you remember that when I was quite a little girl I told you that I wanted to write books?"

"I do. You were a nice little girl, Lyddie—a sensible, well-behaved, little child. Not like those hoydens of girls at Wimbledon. If you write anything worth the postage, you may send it to me—though I'm sure I don't know who'll read it to me."

This was the nearest that Grandpapa could be induced to go towards any *rapprochement* on the eve of Lydia's departure.

She said good-bye to him as affectionately as she dared, and he replied calmly:

"Good-bye to you, my dear. Your Aunt Beryl wants me to give you a Bible or some parting advice, but I shall do nothing of the sort. If you're a good girl, you'll know how to look after yourself, and if you're a bad girl, then all the advice in the world won't keep you straight."

Lydia could not help thinking rather resentfully that Grandpapa's tones sounded just as though either contingency would leave him equally unmoved.

"Good-bye, Grandpapa—good-bye, Uncle George—down, Shamrock—good little dog!"

But Shamrock pursued Lydia and Aunt Beryl all the way to the station, and Lydia's last sight of them showed her Aunt Beryl and the station-master uniting their efforts to prevent Shamrock from taking a flying leap on to the rails.

She felt a little lonely, a very little bit frightened, as the train rushed away with her towards London.

Eighteen, which had been a really mature age while one was still at Miss Glover's, no longer seemed quite so grown up. The other people in the railway carriage all looked much older than that.

Lydia's habitual self-confidence began slightly to fail her.

What if she proved not clever enough for the work at "Elena's," and they sent her home again? Never! She would take up teaching or dressmaking in London, sooner than admit defeat. Besides, there was her writing. She thought of various fragments that she had already put on to paper, and which honestly seemed to her to be good.

The day would come, Lydia was inwardly convinced, when these would work into some not unworthy whole.

In the meanwhile, she reminded herself, in an endeavour to regain her poise of mind, that Uncle George, Aunt Beryl, Mr. Almond, the Jacksons, Miss Glover herself, had all thought her very brave and high-spirited to go away to London by herself, and had made no doubt that her courage and capabilities alike would carry her on to triumph.

She remembered also that Nathalie Palmer had written to her, in reply to her own long letter announcing her plan. She drew the envelope from her pocket, and read Nathalie's warm-hearted inquiries once more, feeling all the comfort of being so regarded by her friend.

"Lydia, I do think you're splendid," wrote Nathalie from Devonshire. "It sounds frightfully brave to be going off to live in London by yourself, and work at the accounts in a big new place like your Madame Elena's. I hope you won't be very lonely, but, of course you're sure to make friends. I do quite agree with you that it will be a tremendous *experience*, and, of course, I know experience is what you've always wanted. I wonder how soon you'll write a book. How proud I shall be when you're a famous authoress, and all your books are in rows in my bookshelf.

"Father is very interested about you. He asked what sort of boarding-house you were going to, and I said of course Miss Raymond was frightfully particular, and it was a friend of her own. He said he was glad to hear it, and from what he remembered, you were too good-looking to be let stay just anywhere! I suppose he meant *men!*

"Remember you promised faithfully to tell me if

anyone fell in love with you. I'm sure they will! No one has with me, but I hardly ever see anyone. This is the way my days are spent, mostly——"

The rest of Nathalie's letter was not so interesting, and Lydia put it away without reading further.

Her mind dwelt upon the first part of the letter, and she smiled to herself.

Even though Mr. Palmer had not seen her since she was fifteen years old, it was pleasant to know that he had thought her good-looking, and Lydia was almost certain that her appearance had improved very much since then, especially now that her dark hair was knotted up at the back of her head, with a high, Spanish-looking comb thrust into one side of the thick, outstanding twist.

"I suppose he meant men!"

That phrase in Nathalie's letter kept coming to her mind, and she smiled to herself a little.

It was quite time, Lydia considered, that she should learn something about men.

Grandpapa was old and didn't count—apart from the fact that, as Lydia shrewdly surmised, he was quite unlike any other man, and could never be looked upon as the representative of a type. Uncle George and Uncle Robert didn't count, either—uncles never did. Bob Senthoven Lydia dismissed with a shrug. She had not seen him since her visit to Wimbledon nearly three years ago, when he had made no favourable impression upon the young candidate for examination honours.

The only other male acquaintance to which Lydia felt that she could fairly lay claim was Mr. Monteagle Almond. She remembered her conversation with him on the subject of her departure from Regency Terrace,

and the ease with which she had contrived to shift his point of view until it agreed with her own.

Judging by that solitary experience, men were not so very difficult to manage.

Lydia boldly admitted to herself that she hoped there would be men at Miss Nettleship's boarding-house.

The hope was realized.

The Bloomsbury boarding-house was large and dark, and Miss Nettleship could accommodate an almost incredible number of boarders there.

She was a brown-eyed, plaintive-looking woman, inclined to stoutness, and concealing, as Lydia afterwards discovered, considerable efficiency under a permanently distressed voice and manner.

"I hoped your auntie might have come with you," she greeted Lydia. "I could easily have put her up—we're not so very full just now, and there's always a corner. I'm so glad to see you, dear, for her sake, and I do hope you'll be happy. You must be sure and tell me if there's anything——"

The eye of the manageress was roving even as she spoke.

"Excuse me, dear—but you know what it is—one has to be on the look-out the whole time—that's the drawing-room bell, and no one answering it. I think I'll have to go myself. I know you quite understand how it is——"

Miss Nettleship hurried away, and Lydia looked round her curiously.

She was in the manageress' own office, a glass-enclosed alcove halfway up the stairs, probably originally designed for a flowery recess, in the palmy days of the old house. It was now boarded in halfway up with light-coloured grained deal, but a few sorry splinters of

coloured glass still hung from the ceiling, clinking forlornly, in solitary token of the once frivolous purposes of the little alcove.

When Miss Nettleship returned, tired and apologetic, but more plaintive than ever, she showed Lydia the rest of the house.

It was built with a total disregard for domestic convenience, that Miss Nettleship assured Lydia was characteristic of old-fashioned London houses, but which she could not sufficiently deplore.

"So difficult ever to get a servant to come here, let alone *stay* here," said Miss Nettleship, sighing.

Lydia did not altogether wonder at it, when she saw the basement, occupied by kitchen, pantry, and scullery, a gas-jet permanently burning in the two latter divisions—and the only outlook of the former, rising area steps, iron railings with cracked paint, and the feet of the passers-by on the pavement.

The kitchen stairs, which led to the narrow hall, were stone, very steep, and perfectly dark.

"However they do, with the trays and all, is more than I can guess. Not that I don't carry them myself, often enough—but my heart's in my mouth the whole time. And girls are so careless, too! We had one broke her ankle, running down these stairs, not a year ago. Luckily she wasn't carrying anything but an empty tray at the time, but you never heard such a noise and a rattling in all your life! It's wicked not having the serving on the same floor as the dining-room, is what I say."

The dining-room was on the ground floor. It was a large room, with a long table already laid for dinner, running down the middle of it, and dusty aspidistras in pots stood in the bay windows, looking out, through

yellowing Nottingham lace curtains, at the grimy dignity of the London plane trees on the far side of the Square railings.

Opposite the dining-room was a smoking-room, Miss Nettleship told Lydia.

"Better not look in now, perhaps," she said. "Some of the gentlemen may be in there."

"How many boarders are here now?"

"It's always varying," Miss Nettleship declared. "But I make rather a specialty, in a way, of permanent lets. There's old Miss Lillicrap—she's always here—and Mrs. Clarence, a widow, and in rather poor health—awfully badly off. And the Bulteels—husband and wife—with a boy who goes to Gower Street University. They're always here, more or less. And there's a very nice maiden lady has been here six months now, and she's said nothing about giving up her room. Miss Forster—I'm sure you'll like her, dear. She's a great card-player, and goes out a good deal. Between ourselves, she's one of the best boarders I have—very regular in settling up, and always likes the best of everything, and doesn't mind paying for it. She's always sending in fruit, and the like. It gives quite a tone to the house to see the boy leaving those baskets of fruit two or three times a week."

"Are there any girls who are going to work every day?" Lydia asked, half hoping that the reply would be in the negative.

"Not girls, no. Generally it's cheaper for girls at work to go to a woman's hostel or into rooms," said Miss Nettleship candidly. "Of course, there are one or two gentlemen. Mr. Bulteel himself has retired from business, I understand, but there's his son, Mr. Hector, that I was telling you about, and there's a

Greek gentleman just now, who's only been here a week. He goes to the City every day. I'll introduce you to everyone at supper to-night, dear. It'll be strange for you at first."

Lydia was more exhilarated than alarmed. She was not shy, and it rather pleased her to think that she would be unique in her position of worker, at least amongst all the other women.

"You'd like to peep into the drawing-room," suggested Miss Nettleship, on the way up to Lydia's bedroom, and from the tone in which she spoke, Lydia guessed that this was the room of which she was proudest.

It was certainly very large and very lofty, with double folding doors in the middle, a marble fireplace at either end, and the dingy remains of much gilding still evident in the decorations.

A solitary little figure sat listlessly at one end of the room, turning over the leaves of a battered picture paper.

"Oh, good evening, Mrs. Clarence," said Miss Nettleship apologetically. "You'll excuse me disturbing you, I know. I'm just showing this young lady round. Miss Lydia Raymond—Mrs. Clarence."

The little lady stood up in an uncertain sort of way, and put out a very tiny hand to Lydia, saying nervously:

"How do you do, Miss—er—er. . . . I hope you're quite well."

"Quite well, thank you," said Lydia, as Aunt Beryl had taught her to say.

She despised Mrs. Clarence at sight.

The widow was very small and slight, and might have been any age between twenty-eight and thirty-nine.

Her hair was of that damp, disastrous yellow, that always looks as though it had been unsuccessfully dyed, her tiny, sallow face was puckered into fretful lines, and Lydia felt convinced that she always wore just such an untidy black silk skirt, showing a sagging at the back, where it failed to meet the dingy, net blouse.

They looked at each other in silence, and Miss Nettleship said at last:

"It's quite all right, Mrs. Clarence—I knew you'd quite understand—you mustn't let us disturb you——"

She covered Lydia's retreat and her own with her usual harassed, good-natured apologies.

"Mrs. Bulteel, and Miss Forster and Mr. Hector are much more lively people than poor Mrs. Clarence," she told Lydia in a consolatory tone, on the way upstairs.

They did not pause until the top landing of all had been reached.

"This is bedroom number seventeen," optimistically declared Miss Nettleship, throwing open a door painted liver-colour, and bearing that number on it in black figures.

It looked more like a cupboard than a bedroom to Lydia, unaccustomed to London, although faint memories of lodging-hunting in her mother's days came back to her as she gazed round.

There was a combined dressing-table and chest of drawers in the room, an iron tripod for washing purposes, with enamel basin and jug, a couple of cane-seated chairs and a low iron bedstead. A print curtain, concealing a row of attenuated iron hooks and wooden pegs, hung against the wall. The only window was a fair-sized skylight.

"I'm going to send you up an easy-chair," almost whispered Miss Nettleship, looking guiltily round her, as though afraid of being overheard. "There's one in Mr. Hector Bulteel's room, and really he doesn't want it—a boy like him. There's a rocker broken, so I can get it away to have it mended, and then I'll bring it up here. This room doesn't have a rocking-chair by rights, but I know myself the comfort they are when one's been on one's feet all day. I'm determined you shall have it, and I only wish it could have been here to-day, dear—but one has to be a bit careful, and Mrs. Bulteel is so sharp, too. But it'll be quite all right—and I know you quite understand, dear."

Miss Nettleship seemed to find comfort in this assurance, which she repeated almost automatically every few moments.

Presently she left Lydia to unpack, telling her that the bell would ring for dinner at seven o'clock.

"I've put you next me at table, dear, for to-night, but of course I can't keep you there. I wish I could, but I know you understand how it is—people are so particular. So you'll understand if you're down at the end for breakfast to-morrow, won't you? Everyone takes their seat according to the time they've been here—and the latest comers down at the bottom, so you'll be next to the Greek gentleman. Shall you find your way, dear? I'd come and fetch you, but I must overlook the waitress a bit—you know how it is—one can't trust those girls a minute."

"Shall I come straight to the dining-room?"

"They generally wait for the bell in the smoking-room, but they're very prompt in. And you'd better be prompt, too, dear. That old Miss Lillicrap's *awful* for taking half of every vegetable dish that's handed,

and I simply can't let them have more than enough to go once the way round."

Miss Nettleship went away, sighing.

Lydia thought that she was very kind, but talked too much.

She wondered whether Aunt Beryl had told Miss Nettleship all about her school triumphs, and the post that they had obtained for her. The thought of Aunt Beryl almost made her jump. Regency Terrace seemed such a very long way off already! She could hardly believe that she had been with them all—Grandpapa and Uncle George and Aunt Beryl, and Shamrock—at breakfast-time that very morning.

After she had taken off her hat and scrutinized herself carefully in the looking-glass, Lydia wrote to Aunt Beryl a postcard, to tell her of her safe arrival and of Miss Nettleship's kindness.

Then she went downstairs.

She could not make up her mind to open the door of the smoking-room, from behind which came the sound of feminine voices, but hung about in the narrow hall, under pretext of seeking a box in which to deposit her postcard.

Suddenly the sound of a deferential voice in her ear made her turn round.

"Did you want to post a letter?"

Lydia faced a slim, dark man, with glistening, black eyes and a clean-shaven, swarthy face. She guessed, from some indefinable intonation that hardly amounted to an accent, in his quiet, silky tones, that this was the Greek gentleman alluded to by the manageress.

"Is there a letter-box?" she asked.

"I hardly advise you to make use of it, if your card is urgent. I have seen it remain uncleared for days.

The servant is very careless. But there is a pillar box just outside. Allow me!"

Lydia hesitated, but the Greek put out a slim finger and thumb, and neatly twitched the card out of her hand.

"A pleasure," said he, opening the front door.

As he left it ajar behind him, Lydia supposed that he had only a few steps to go, and remained in the hall.

In a moment he reappeared.

"That should be delivered by the first post to-morrow morning, Miss Raymond."

Lydia wondered how he knew her name, but the next minute she received enlightenment.

"I do not know the East Coast personally, but your home must be in a pleasant spot. The seaside is always attractive," conversationally observed the Greek gentleman, apparently unaware of anything obnoxious in his method of acquiring information as to his neighbour's concerns.

The reverberation of a gong saved Lydia from making any reply, although the Greek's manner was so much that of ordinary social intercourse that she almost found herself wondering whether her annoyance at his indiscretion were justified or not.

Before the sound of the gong had died away the smoking-room door was opened, and half a dozen people had filed past Lydia into the dining-room, each one of them giving her a curious glance, sometimes accompanied by a slight bow, as they passed.

She went into the room last, and was relieved to see Miss Nettleship's broad figure and coils of untidy brown hair surmounting her pleasant, anxious-looking face, at the head of the table.

When Lydia was beside her, Miss Nettleship said aloud:

"I must introduce Miss Raymond to you. I hope she's going to be here some time. Miss Lydia Raymond, I should say. Miss Lillicrap—Mrs. Bulteel—Mr. Bulteel—Mr. Hector Bulteel—you've met Mrs. Clarence already——"

Lydia exchanged bows rather nervously right and left. Mr. Bulteel, who had a melancholy yellow face with prominent eyes, and wore an alpaca coat, and trousers that bagged at the knees, was the only person to smile at her—a doubtful, sallow sort of smile.

Lydia noticed that the Greek, although he had not been named by the manageress, also bowed, much more elaborately than anybody else, and sought her eye with a meaning look, as though some understanding already existed between them.

The meal was a very silent one.

"We quite miss Miss Forster; she's always so bright," Miss Nettleship remarked in a general sort of way. "I expect she's gone to those friends of hers again, for Bridge."

Miss Nettleship did not visibly partake of the entirety of dinner. When the tepid soup had been handed round by a particularly heavy-footed, loud-breathing servant, who never seemed to have quite enough space to move round the table without slightly lurching against the back of each chair in turn, Miss Nettleship rose and hurried away to the basement.

"I always do the carving downstairs," she told Lydia in a whisper. "Then there's no question of favouring."

Equally Miss Nettleship disappeared again after the meat course, presumably to perform the same office by the pudding.

"I'm so sorry, dear—but you know what it is—one can't trust those girls to themselves for a moment. Irene's such a feather-head, and poor old Agnes——"

Miss Nettleship squeezed past the chairs, and hurried away without particularizing the deficiencies of poor old Agnes. Nor did they require pointing out, Lydia reflected drily, if Agnes was, as she supposed, the cook.

After Miss Nettleship had left the room, the conversation, such as it was, mostly came from Mrs. Clarence and Mrs. Bulteel, a pinched, anæmic-looking little Cockney with frizzy, colourless hair.

Hector Bulteel, a yet more pallid edition of his mother, with an upstanding crest of hair that made him look like a cockatoo, said no word throughout the meal, and the Greek gentleman was equally silent.

Old Miss Lillicrap, who had her place at the right hand of the manageress, only spoke in a shrill, quavering old voice, in order to abuse the quality of her food.

Lydia looked furtively round at them all, and felt rather dismayed.

She wondered whether they would ever take on the similitude of real people to her, or if they would continue to appear as mere grotesque figures that could bear no serious relation to her new life.

VIII

THE day following Lydia's arrival in London was a Sunday and gave her further opportunity for studying her fellow inmates.

She remained in her own room, however, most of the morning, until the maid Irene burst in upon her, a victim to that peculiar breathlessness so frequently characteristic of lodging- or boarding-house servants.

"There's a young lady wants to see you in the drawing-room," she panted.

Lydia, much surprised, went downstairs.

A strong and greasy smell of roasting pervaded the stairs, and the clatter of a Sunday dinner in preparation could be faintly heard ascending from the basement.

In the drawing-room sat old Miss Lillicrap, in a violet silk dress and a lace cap with ribbons, nodding above a newspaper.

A large, white-haired, but somehow youthful-looking female figure, unknown to Lydia, bent over the writing-table.

In the middle of the room stood Lydia's visitor, a small, plain girl, with a pale face and untidy fair hair, who put out her hand in a business-like way.

"I'm from Elena's," she said abruptly. "My name is Graham. Old Madam said I was to come and see how you were getting on, and if you'll be ready to start to-morrow."

"Oh, yes," said Lydia. "Won't you sit down?"

Miss Graham selected a chair in the middle of the room, as far as possible removed from the other two inmates.

Lydia recognized and approved the intention, but was acutely conscious that the pen of the lady at the writing-table had ceased its scratching, and that the newspaper of Miss Lillicrap was no longer rustling.

In the motionless silence of the large room Miss Graham gave Lydia information concerning the establishment of Madame Elena.

"You've seen old Madam, I know. She always interviews us girls herself before engaging us. That's one of the things that's done quite different to other places. But it's your first experience, isn't it?"

"Yes. I've only just left school."

If Lydia hoped to impress Miss Graham by the announcement, she was destined to disappointment.

"You may thank your lucky stars," said that young lady impressively, "that old Madam took to you. Girls have been tumbling over one another, by all accounts, to get that job of yours."

"Madame Ribeiro seemed very kind," said Lydia demurely.

"You won't see anything of her in the shop. Madame Elena runs that part of it altogether. She bosses the staff, of course, and does all the buying, but she's no head for figures, and that's why there's to be an accountant. You'll be sort of different from the other girls, in your position. Higher up, I mean."

Lydia felt very pleased, but she only said:

"Are all the others saleswomen?"

"Elena mostly does that herself, but she lets the senior girl, Miss Ryott, help. She and the other one, Miss Saxon, are really models. I'm at the desk."

"Do you like it?"

Miss Graham shrugged her little thin shoulders.

"I see plenty of life," she remarked. "You'll be in the show-room too. There's a table behind a screen for you, all ready. The bills will be brought to you as soon as I've stamped them."

"Shall I help in the selling?"

"You're sure to be roped in at sale-time. That's only once a year, thank God, and that was over last month. On the whole, we've got a very good berth there; I fancy quite different to shop-girls, or anything like that. You get a topping meal in the middle of the day—they say old Madam is frightfully keen on the girls being well-fed. It's a fad of hers. There's a housekeeper in the basement, an old woman called Entwhistle, and she looks after the meals. There's a first and second table for dinner."

"Are there enough of you for that?"

"Oh, yes. There are two young ladies in the millinery, and a fitter besides. And surely to goodness," said Miss Graham, "you know enough to know that the shop couldn't be left to look after itself for an hour in the middle of the day."

Lydia was not pleased at the slighting tone employed by her visitor, and replied briefly:

"I suppose not."

Then her natural instinct to engage the liking, and, if possible, the friendship of those with whom her lot might be thrown, made her exclaim frankly:

"I shan't know anything at first, I'm afraid. But I hope you'll help me a little."

"Oh," said Miss Graham matter-of-factly, "I shan't have anything much to do with you. Old Madam only sent round to say I was to come and look you up

because there was nobody else. Miss Ryott is on her holiday, and won't get back till to-morrow, and Miss Saxon is a new-comer herself."

She rose, apparently indifferent to the effect of extreme ungraciousness that her speech might well have produced.

"I'd better call for you to-morrow morning. It's out of my way, but then Elena said you didn't know London, and would probably get lost. Will you be ready by half-past eight?"

"Yes," said Lydia. "I'm sorry it's out of your way."

"So am I, but it can't be helped. Whatever made you come to a place like this?" inquired Miss Graham, throwing round her a glance expressive of anything but admiration.

"The manageress is a friend of ours," Lydia said stiffly. "Do you live at home, then?"

"Lord, no. I share diggings with another girl. Well, so long then. Half-past eight to-morrow."

"I shall be waiting in the hall," said Lydia. "Good-bye, and thank you for coming."

She politely escorted Miss Graham to the front door, where the smell of cooking was stronger than ever.

As she went upstairs again, the lady of the writing-table came out of the drawing-room.

"Good morning," said she brightly. "We must introduce ourselves. I'm Miss Forster."

She laughed heartily as she spoke.

"It's nearly luncheon-time. Won't you come back into the drawing-room?"

Lydia inwardly wondered slightly why Miss Forster, who had, according to the manageress, only been in the house a few weeks, should adopt so proprietary a

tone and manner, but she followed her into the drawing-room.

Miss Lillicrap had gone away, and the room was empty, as they took possession of two arm-chairs.

"We've got the place to ourselves!" proclaimed Miss Forster with some obviousness. "Most people have gone to church, but I'm a terrible pagan, I'm afraid. Now, I wonder if I'm right, Miss Raymond—but I've an idea that you're a bit of a pagan, too?"

Lydia made a civil, but meaningless, sound in reply. She had every intention of going to church in the evening with Miss Nettleship, but considered that it would appear offensive to proclaim her Christianity bluntly aloud in the face of what Miss Forster so evidently looked upon as a compliment.

She gazed at the lady, who continued to talk gaily, and instinctively drew certain conclusions from the scrutiny.

Miss Forster was a handsome, hard-faced woman, presenting a great effect of careful smartness, between forty and fifty years of age. She had obviously devoted much whalebone and a certain amount of physical force to the rigid corsetting of an over-ample figure. Her extremely white hair showed the deep, regular indentations of artificial waving, and was elaborately dressed with a good many sparkling prongs and high combs, visible even beneath the large be-feathered black hat, pinned very much on to one side of her head. Her shoes were small, with Louis XV heels, and looked overtight for her short, plump feet, and her hands were carefully manicured.

Lydia uncharitably surmised that one of the effects at which she aimed was that of a woman who could have married well had she chosen to do so, and that it

was to this end that she wore a sapphire and diamond ring on the third finger of her left hand, and another one with a large blue scarab on the forefinger of her right.

Her voice was high-pitched and emphatic.

"Is this your first glimpse of the world?" she demanded playfully.

Lydia felt rather at a loss for a reply.

"I've come up to work," she said at last. "But I hope I shall see something of the world while I'm here."

"Oh, I expect so. Of course, this is a quiet part of town—not like Kensington or the West End, by any means—in fact, I've never lived so far out before. My friends are always trying to get me to move into a little West End flat somewhere, but I say, 'No; I don't care for the bother of housekeeping.' And really we're quite well done here, you know, and of course I don't hesitate to order in any little extra thing. I'm afraid I like my comforts, Miss Raymond. It's what I've been accustomed to all my life."

"Have you always lived in London?" Lydia politely inquired.

She was remembering Grandpapa's axiom: *Always let the other people talk about themselves.*

It appeared that Miss Forster did not require much encouragement to do so with great animation, and a number of rather superfluous gesticulations, illustrative of her words.

"Oh, my dear Miss Raymond! I always say I'm a rolling stone!"

Miss Forster's hands described rapid revolutions one over the other in the air.

"I've been in all sorts of places, but I've come to the

conclusion that London is the place to live in. There's always something to *do* there. If it's bad weather, there are concerts or theatres always going on—and one can always pop round to one's club and get a game of Bridge."

As Miss Forster enumerated these resources of urban life, she successively agitated her fingers up and down an imaginary key-board, gazed eagerly through imaginary opera-glasses held up to her eyes, and rapidly dealt out a few imaginary cards.

"I'm a tremendous gambler, I'm afraid. I love my game of Bridge. There are some dear friends of mine living in Lexham Gardens, who frequently give Bridge parties. I daresay you've heard of them—Sir Rupert and Lady Honoret?"

"I don't think I have."

"No?" said Miss Forster, looking rather disappointed. "She's so very well known in Society that I thought you might have. I must introduce you some day. Such a clever woman!"

Suddenly an echo came back to Lydia's well-trained memory. She was in the drawing-room of the Wimbledon house again, listening to Aunt Evelyn's droning voice reading from her illustrated paper:

"Fancy! it says here that 'the wife of this city magnate is no mean critic of *l'école moderne*, having herself contributed on several occasions to the sum of New Thought literature, in the shape of several charmingly written sketches *pour nos autres*.' That would be this Sir Rupert Honoret's wife, I suppose. They say she's a Jewess."

"Doesn't Lady Honoret write?" said Lydia.

"That's it!" cried Miss Forster delightedly. "I

thought you must have heard of her; she's *so* well known."

"Yes, I have heard of her. I remember now," said Lydia, inwardly congratulating herself on the excellence of her memory.

"I feel certain that you and I are going to be pals," Miss Forster exclaimed breezily. "Between ourselves, there's nobody I've taken to very violently here. I really thought it was more of a residential hotel than a boarding-house, or I shouldn't have come. One really can't entertain one's friends here, with such awful servants, and that terrible old Miss Lillicrap always about the place. She has a heart, you know, so one can't say much."

Both Miss Forster's hands flew to her ample bust, in indication of the nature of Miss Lillicrap's complaint.

"However, I belong to a *very* smart West End Ladies' Club, so I can always give my little card parties there. You must come and have tea there some day," said Miss Forster airily.

"I should like to," replied Lydia truthfully. She was not attracted by Miss Forster, but people with literary ladyships for their friends might be very useful, and Lydia quite complacently told herself that the accident of her having listened to, and remembered, Aunt Evelyn's item of information, had done her good service with this woman, who might easily bring her into that world where she most wished to find herself.

She began to think that, perhaps, after all, the boarding-house might count for even more than Madame Elena's.

At dinner, which on Sundays was in the middle of

the day, the Greek, who was her neighbour, talked to her and asked if she were going out in the afternoon.

"I have to unpack," said Lydia demurely.

She had unpacked almost everything in the course of the morning, but she thought that the Greek meant to ask if she would go out with him, and instinct told her that his evident admiration would only be increased by a pretence at coyness.

"Do you care for the theatre?" he inquired next.

"Oh, I love it," said Lydia frankly.

"We must make up a party one evening. Mrs. Bulteel is very fond of a good show, I know," said the Greek.

Lydia felt excited.

Evidently her life was not to be all hard work.

She ventured into the drawing-room after the hot and heavy meal, but found that Sunday afternoon was by common consent given up to repose.

Miss Lillicrap and Miss Forster both went to their rooms, little Mrs. Clarence, sunk into an arm-chair with a library novel, fell asleep at once, and snored faintly from time to time; Mrs. Bulteel disposed herself elegantly upon the drawing-room sofa, and said to Lydia:

"I hope you don't mind me having my toes up like this?"

"Oh, no, indeed."

"I'm not very strong. My husband and my son go for a walk on Sunday afternoons, but I'm not very strong."

Mrs. Bulteel closed her eyes complacently, and also went to sleep.

Lydia took her fountain-pen from her pocket, having first sampled the pens on the writing-table, and found them all very old, rather rusty, and either broken or

cross-nibbed, and wrote a letter to Aunt Beryl. She gave full details of Miss Nettleship's good-nature, and of her visit from Miss Graham, and even reported a little of her conversation with Miss Forster, the friend of Sir Rupert and Lady Honoret. She said nothing at all about the Greek gentleman.

The evening meal, at seven o'clock on week-days, was not until half-past eight on Sundays, and Miss Nettleship, after entertaining Lydia to tea in her own room, took her to church at six o'clock, talking all the way.

Lydia was bored, and in church began to feel rather homesick and apprehensive of her first day's work on the morrow.

Supper proved to be a cheerless meal. There was no soup, only portions of cold pressed beef and beetroot, and a chilly helping of custard-pudding upon each plate. The cheese was substantial enough, but the section of the dish that held biscuits was empty by the time it reached Lydia, and although she asked Irene for some bread, Irene forgot to bring it.

She went to bed still feeling hungry.

Next morning she was introduced to the establishment of Madame Elena.

"Us girls have to use the side door, of course," Miss Graham explained. But before they went inside she showed Lydia the front entrance, with "Elena" scrawled in gilt letters above the door, and a small, diamond-paned window that displayed only a gilt chair, over which was flung a brilliant scarlet and gold kimono, and a little gilt stand, on which hung a necklace of green jade, surmounted by a minute hat composed entirely of fluted purple tulle, apparently held together by a jewelled buckle.

"Madame Elena dressed the window herself," said Miss Graham. "She goes in for colour contrasts."

Her tone denoted no particular admiration, but Lydia privately was a good deal impressed by the window. Not with this wonderfully effective restraint were the shop fronts decked into which she had hitherto been accustomed to gaze.

She expected Madame Elena to be an æsthetic-looking creature in an artistic smock, and was disappointed at the sight of a very fat, good-natured-faced woman, with an immense mop of auburn hair and a heavily-powdered face. Instead of the art-smock, she wore a tight black skirt, that seemed to emphasize the disproportionate shortness of her legs, and a lace shirt with an elaborate high collar and falling *jabot* of lace.

"Brought a black dress?" she inquired. "Rosie here will show you where the girls' dressing-room is, and where you can leave your things. You change here, of course. What about shoes and stockings?"

She shook her head at Lydia's black Oxford shoes.

"Get a pair of court slippers at lunch-time. Rosie will tell you where to go. Stockings don't matter, as you'll be behind your desk all the time. You needn't worry about corsets, either, not being a model. Now go and change, then you can come back to me here, and we'll go through the books together and give you some idea of your job."

"Are you nervous?" Rosie Graham asked Lydia with a quick look, when they were in the basement dressing-room.

"Oh, no, not really," Lydia replied, with more spirit than accuracy.

Miss Graham burst into an impish laugh.

"Oh, you lovely little liar!" said she.

Lydia was not sure whether to admit the truth of the apostrophe or not.

She used all her intelligence during the next three hours, but Madame Elena's method of instruction was slap-dash and sketchy, and Lydia learnt most during the frequent intervals when her teacher was called away, and she was left alone with the great ledgers and invoice-books.

The technical terms, and the abbreviations especially, puzzled her greatly, but much of the work reminded her of the old problems at Miss Glover's, when she had been told to "show the working" on the black-board for the benefit of the other girls.

The stock appeared to consist of evening gowns, millinery and an occasional scarf or veil. Nothing was made on the premises except hats, but Madame Elena sometimes undertook commissions, for very favoured customers, during her trips to Paris.

Some of the papers relating to wholesale purchases were in French, and Lydia regretfully felt that her old deficiency would find her out again.

In spite of the French, however, she thought that the book-keeping would prove to be well within her capacity, and felt cheered.

Madame Elena was very good-natured, not at all the overbearing and dictatorial principal that Lydia had half expected to find her. They worked together in her room all the morning, Lydia uninterruptedly, and Madame Elena in the midst of many respectful summonses and urgent telephone calls.

Just before one o'clock, a tall girl with dark hair, dressed in the saleswoman's austerely smart black and white, once more announced the arrival of an important client.

Madame Elena darted through into the shop again, and this time was away for nearly an hour.

Through the door of her tiny office, which she had left ajar, Lydia could hear an occasional phrase:

"I really don't think you'd ever regret it . . . it's so *exactly* your style. I really shouldn't urge it if I didn't think you'd be pleased with it. . . . Oh, *no,* Moddam —you couldn't call that *cerise* by any possibility. Old rose it is—just your shade. . . ."

Madame Elena came back at last, flinging herself into the chair before the writing-table.

"Oof! I thought we should never get done. She meant to take it, all the time, too. Now, Miss Raymond, let's see you enter that. Here's the bill."

"Motor-bonnet, at seventy-five and sixpence," Lydia read.

"You must describe it in your entry, so that we shall recognize it," Madame Elena declared. "Turn up the invoice."

When Lydia had found it she discovered with surprise that the recent purchase figured as "Rose-red and ash-grey motoring capote."

"*That* sounds more like it!" said the principal, in satisfied accents. "Now you'll know how it should go down on the account."

She pulled out a gold watch from her tight waistband.

"Poor child! the girls will have finished dinner. I suppose they didn't like to fetch you while you were in here—and quite right too. You'd better come out and get some lunch with me."

They went out through the show-room, and Lydia saw Rosie Graham sitting in the small, glass-panelled

box near the door, with neat piles of change on the ledge in front of her.

As they went past, Lydia meekly walking behind Madame Elena, Rosie made a derisive face at her, and Lydia understood that it was an unusual honour to be taken out to lunch by the principal.

They went to a small restaurant close by, and Madame Elena made Lydia blush by remarking impressively to the waitress who brought them the bill of fare:

"Make out two separate bills for this, waitress. Now, my dear, what are you going to have?"

Lydia had not expected to be Madame Elena's guest at the meal, but she considered the emphasis indelicate, and wished that it had not been thought necessary.

On the whole, however, she liked Madame Elena, who kept up an incessant stream of lively talk, and gave her a quantity of information about the business, the customers and the staff.

"That little Graham, now—she's been with us ever since we opened, and done her job first class. But she'll never do any better for herself than she's doing now. The reason why, because she's got no tact. I'd never trust her to show so much as a motor-veil to a client—she'd tell her the colour was too young for her, as soon as winking. Of course, my dear, I'm telling you these things because you're not quite in the same position as the show-room girls. That's an understood thing, and has been from the first. More like my understudy you'll come to be in time, I hope. That is if you and I understand one another, as I think we're going to."

Lydia felt flattered.

"I'll do my very best," she said earnestly.

"I'm sure you will, and once you've mastered the system you'll be all right, and I'm sure I shall be thankful to get the books off my mind. I've no head for figures, and never had," said Madame Elena, with perfect complacency.

She dismissed Lydia at five o'clock, although the working day was not over until six.

"But I know well enough what a first day's work is," she remarked shrewdly. "You've a splitting head, and don't know a one from a two by this time. Trot along, and if I were you, I'd walk home. The air will do you good. You can start properly to-morrow. It's a slack time of year, anyhow."

Lydia departed gratefully.

Business life was not going to be the inhuman affair that books represented it to be, after all; Madame Elena had been good-natured and patient, although Lydia easily divined that she could be far otherwise on occasion, and although she had had no opportunity for intercourse with the other girls, they had looked at her in a not unfriendly way.

She walked across the Park, gazing with interest at the people she met, until she perceived that several of the men that passed her were inclined to stare frankly back at her, or to smile furtively.

Lydia remembered certain pieces of advice given long ago by Aunt Beryl, and which had always been disregarded, because they sounded so singularly superfluous to the quiet neighbourhood of Regency Terrace.

She ceased to look about her, and walked more quickly, conscious all the time of a certain exultation.

Surely men only stared like that at pretty girls or attractive girls?

She wished that she knew whether she were really pretty or not.

In a very little while Lydia lost the sense of novelty, and began to feel as though she had always been independent.

She soon found that her life at Madame Elena's and her life at the boarding-house had both become quite real to her, and very interesting. Each was absolutely separate from the other, but both made up a sum of experiences that absorbed and excited her.

People were extraordinarily interesting.

For all her capability and astonishing effect of maturity, Lydia was not quite nineteen years old, and it was only much later on that she realized how entirely her interest in her fellow-creatures had confined itself to the effect produced upon them by the personality of Lydia Raymond.

IX

THERE were wheels within wheels at Madame Elena's establishment. Romantic friendships for one another amongst Madame Elena's "young ladies," sudden desperate quarrels and equally desperate reconciliations, all formed part of the fabric of everyday life, and afforded discussion at the midday dinner in the basement.

The girls, as Miss Graham had said, were all catered for.

"Don't be afraid to come again," Mrs. Entwhistle, the housekeeper, would exclaim jovially from the head of the table, acting, it was understood, under direct orders from Madame Ribeiro, whom the girls called Old Madam.

It was well known that Old Madam would not have anyone who might be working at Elena's stinted of a good meat meal in the middle of the day, which she called "an economy in the end." The number of helpings was never restricted, and the meat was always followed by a substantial pudding.

Lydia at first watched with amazement the two accomplished young women from the millinery, both of them pale London girls, send up their plates twice or three times, in eager response to Mrs. Entwhistle's invitation.

Miss Graham, always at her desk, and the little needlewoman who attended to alterations, were the

only girls on the premises not selected, partly on account of good looks.

"A pretty saleswoman sets off the goods," was another of Old Madam's reported aphorisms. "Prettiness" was the keynote of the establishment, and with this end in view, Christian names were always used in business hours.

Rosie Graham told Lydia that Miss Ryott's name, Georgina, not considered an ornamental one by Madame Elena, had been abbreviated to Gina, as having a pleasant *soupçon* of Italian romance. Gina, in fact, rather looked the part. She was a tall girl, of a full figure, with crape-black hair rolled back from a round, cream-coloured face, dark-brown eyes and beautiful teeth.

Gina only painted her lips a very little.

Miss Saxon, the other show-room "young lady" on the other hand, who said that her name was Marguerite, painted her face, as well as her lips, most artistically. She was flaxen-haired and very slim, with babyish blue eyes and a tiny mouth. She was always called for by Madame Elena to show off any *toliette de jeune fille*.

Lydia found it easy to believe that the staff was made up of young women taken from a class superior to that of the ordinary London shop-girl. That was Old Madam's policy.

At intervals, Madame Ribeiro, always unannounced, drove up to the shop entrance of "Elena's," in her little old-fashioned, closed carriage, and walked slowly through the show-room, up the shallow steps that led to millinery, and into the small alcove, glass-panelled, where sat Madame Elena, poring over large tomes, or sometimes inditing scrawled communications on large, mauve-coloured sheets of notepaper, with "Elena"

carelessly running across the top corner of the page in big purple lettering.

Old Madam never distinguished Lydia by any special notice on these occasions. She generally remained with Madame Elena for half an hour or so, and sometimes the latter would strike her little bronze bell, and ask, "Marguerite, *chérie,*" or "Gina, my child" to bring in afternoon tea for Madam.

"Anyone would think we were tea-shop girls," said Miss Ryott pettishly.

The order meant an excursion to the basement, where Mrs. Entwhistle had to be found, the keys asked for, and bread-and-butter cut very thin and arranged on a china plate, and two or three sponge biscuits taken out of a special tin, and the whole arranged on a small green-and-white tea-service consecrated to Madame Elena's use. But then Madame Elena had her tea sent up at a reasonable hour, when the girls had theirs, and Mrs. Entwhistle prepared it, which she would never do unaided at any hour earlier than four o'clock. If Old Madam chose to have tea before half-past three one of the girls must get it ready.

Gina, especially on a hot afternoon in the slack season, very much preferred the shop.

"Shall I help you, dear?" affectionately inquired Marguerite. "Lydia could give us a call if anyone came in. Not that anyone will—they are all in Scotland or at the sea somewhere—lucky things!"

"Thanks, dear—how sweet of you!"

They went away arm-in-arm, leaving Lydia drowsily writing out "Marked down" tickets, copied from a list of Madame Elena's making.

"*That* friendship won't last," remarked Miss Graham sapiently, from her desk.

She was right, as usual.

Lydia had not been very long at Elena's when the Great Quarrel took place, and assumed an intensity that could only have obtained during the month of September.

It all reminded Lydia very much of the girls at Miss Glover's school.

Gina, it was evident enough, had hitherto dominated the little group of girls, but her temporary infatuation for the society of Miss Marguerite Saxon had rather diminished her prestige, and Marguerite, moreover, had made herself popular with the millinery young ladies by talking agreeably to them at dinner-time, when they sat together at the second table. Consequently they championed her with vigour.

"It really is too bad, you know, dear. Marguerite is awfully sensitive—those blondes so often are, much more so than brunettes, I fancy—and of course she feels it all the more because they used to be such *friends*. That's what hurts her so much."

"Well, Gina is hurt about it, too—and has cause to be, in my opinion," inexorably said the girl who did alterations.

The first and second tables were allowed to overlap during the slack season very often.

"How did it begin?" Lydia asked.

But to this there was no satisfactory reply.

How did the slackening of those romantic bonds first make itself felt?

"Marguerite couldn't help noticing that Gina's manner had altered, of course," said someone vaguely.

From this painful illumination it appeared as though Miss Saxon and Miss Ryott had proceeded to revive

their drooping interest in one another by a series of mutual provocations.

"Gina is awfully proud. You couldn't expect her to take the first step. I mean, she's so frightfully proud."

"You know, I believe Madame Elena knows about it," said Rosie, giggling, precluded by Mrs. Entwhistle's presence from making use of the auburn-headed principal's usual *sobriquet* of "Old Peroxide."

It was quite true that Madame Elena was inclined to favour Gina. Lydia had noticed it with resentment.

When Rosie Graham's shrewdness was justified, as it almost invariably was, by the event, and Madame Elena showed definite signs of partisanship in the quarrel, Gina became established as the heroine of the hour.

One afternoon, just before closing time, she suddenly burst into tears after a prolonged search for a mislaid pencil—that eternal preoccupation of the shop-girl's day.

"Don't cry," said Lydia very gently, and feeling very impatient, since she disliked any display of emotion in other people—unless it was directly concerned with herself.

"I'll lend you mine."

Such a loan was unheard of, for the pencils, suspended by a chain from each girl's waist, were in constant use, and the rule obliged each one to provide her own.

"Oh, I don't care," sobbed Gina, recklessly noisy. "Thank's most awfully, dear. I know it's sweet of you—but I'm fed up with everything."

She sank into a chair, still sobbing hysterically.

"So are we all," said Miss Saxon low and viciously, looking up from the drawer before which she was

kneeling, carefully swathing some frail chiffon scarves in tissue-paper. "So are we all, I should imagine, in this heat and all, but we don't make a song and dance about it, I suppose. What *I* should call absolute carrying on for notice."

As though to verify the words, Madame Elena's glass door flew open.

"What's all this noise?" she asked irately. "If you girls think you're here to make a row——"

Her eye fell on Gina, who had the wisdom to make a visible effort to check her sobs and rise to her feet. Lydia noted, with instinctive approval, that the face she turned to her principal was paler than usual, with black marks under either eye.

"I'm very sorry, I'm sure," she faltered.

"What's the matter?"

Gina was silent, gulping.

Madame Elena looked sharply round. Her eye fell on Marguerite, still demurely smoothing out silver paper.

Miss Saxon, less intelligent than Gina, and evidently far less intuitive than the watching Lydia, made the mistake of allowing a very small sneer to show itself upon her little roseleaf face.

Lydia saw Madame Elena's expression alter.

She laid an authoritative hand upon Gina's shoulder, and gave her a friendly push.

"Go in there," she said. "I'm going to get to the bottom of this."

They vanished into the principal's own sanctum, Marguerite, apparently no expert in the interpretation of signs, observing with satisfaction:

"I hope she'll get properly skinned alive for making

a row like that in business hours. Why, it's downright unladylike."

Miss Graham, from her desk in the corner, gave her little scoffing laugh.

"Don't be a fool, Marguerite. She was playing for that, of course. She made that noise on purpose so as Perox should hear her, and ask what was up. Old Perox has been dying to hear what the row's about between you two for days, and now Gina can pitch her own yarn. Just like Gina!"

Lydia was astounded, as she often was, at the little Cockney's penetration.

"Why are you staring, goggle-eyes?" said Miss Graham, rudely but not unkindly. "Don't you think it's true?"

With Marguerite Saxon's small, squirrel face turned to catch her answer, Lydia made a diplomatic evasion.

"Rather an unfair advantage to take, wasn't it?" she hazarded.

"I'll tell Gina you think so," said Rosie, like a shot.

She burst out laughing at the dismay which Lydia, involuntarily, and to her own vexation, felt that she reflected upon her face.

"You don't like that, do you?" remarked the terrible Miss Graham. "You want to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds—keep in with everyone all round, and boss the lot of us. I know your sort. I daresay you'll bring it off, too, given you're here long enough."

"I don't know what you mean," said Lydia, instinctively adopting the phraseology of her surroundings.

Rosie gave her little shrug.

"Don't you worry, I'm only chaffing. *I* shan't make mischief. I like pulling your leg," explained Miss Graham kindly, "because it's so dead easy, that's all."

"Don't mind her, dear," said Marguerite. "That's her style, that is. It doesn't mean anything. I say, do *hark* at that girl in there!"

Faint sounds, as of an eloquent outpouring of words mingled with an occasional sob, came from the partition behind which Gina and the principal were secluded.

"She's crying dreadfully," said Lydia, with a dim idea of diminishing, by her compassionate tone, the effect of her previous comment upon Miss Ryott's methods.

A sardonic glance from Rosie Graham made her uncasily aware that this manœuvre had been only too transparent.

However, Rosie only remarked scornfully:

"Crying! That's nothing at the end of a day's work. Anyone can cry in the evenings—in fact, it's easier than not. One's tired, and it's been beastly hot all day, and it's a relief to sit down and howl. Most girls do it regularly if they aren't going out anywhere, and can risk having a red nose. Wait till you see a girl crying at eight o'clock in the morning—then it's time enough to be sorry for her. If she cries then, it's because she can't help it. If she cries at night she's just letting herself go."

"*My* difficulty is that I never can cry, however much I feel things," said Miss Saxon, true to the feminine instinct, so much condemned by Lydia's grandfather, of making instant personal application of a generality.

"I get awfully upset—quite foolishly so, mother always says. 'You'll never go through life, dear,' she says, 'if you take every little thing to heart so much.' It's awfully wearing, too—things kind of prey on me. I just go on turning them over and over in my own mind, you know. But as for crying—well, it's just as though

I couldn't. I'd give anything to, sometimes—you know, I feel it would be such a relief, like—but I never was one to cry, even as a child."

Miss Saxon, much interested in her own monologue, appeared as though she might go on for ever.

Rosie Graham made an expressive grimace at Lydia, and formed with her lips:

"Good reason why!" at the same time pointing to her own little sallow face, with a glance at Marguerite's carefully rose-tinted cheeks.

Lydia smiled discreetly, safely conscious that she had her back turned to Miss Saxon.

The opportunity for which she had been looking came that evening.

She waited for Gina.

The other girls went down to the dressing-room, pinned on their straw and flower-wreathed hats, took hasty glances into the tiny mirror propped up against the window, and rubbed at their shining, heated faces with leaves of *papier poudre,* torn from little pink or blue books. Only Marguerite Saxon possessed a small silver elegance, hanging from a long chain, containing a little puff, with which she dabbed the tip of her nose delicately.

"Good night, dear," she said cordially to Lydia, who responded as cordially, with her readiest smile. Already she guessed that Miss Saxon was willing to make a bid for her friendship, in the new-born apprehension that the tide of partisanship was turning rapidly in Gina's favour.

With Gina, the advance was even easier. It was long after closing hours when she finally emerged from Madame Elena's room, and then she was not alone.

Madame Elena, in the immense be-plumed hat and long suède gloves that she always affected, preceded her.

"Lydia! What are you doing here?" she exclaimed sharply.

"I've finished those Paris model tickets, Madame Elena," said Lydia meekly.

She had printed over two dozen cards whilst she waited, it being one of the sign manuals of the establishment to display all such tickets in elaborate fancy letterings.

"You haven't!"

Madame Elena made one of her rapid, swooping movements, and snatched up a handful of the cards, miraculously avoiding those on which the ink was still wet.

"Now I call that charming," said Madame Elena, with genuine enthusiasm. "First class. How on earth did you manage to get the letters all different and so straight! But don't stay overtime another evening like that. You may find yourself locked in."

She nodded and passed out of the side door, demonstratively waiting for the two girls, in order to lock it behind her.

"I get in here," she said, pausing where a long row of omnibuses was drawn up beside the kerb. "Good night, girls."

"Good night, Madame Elena," they chorussed politely.

"Which is your way, dear?" inquired Gina, who called everyone "dear" without discrimination.

"Right across the Park. I generally walk," said Lydia.

"Rotten to be so far off. *I* live miles out, too, right the way to Mornington Crescent. I'll walk with you,

if you like. The air'll do my head good, and I may as well get in at Oxford Circus as anywhere else."

"Have you a headache?" said Lydia sympathetically.

"I should think I have! Why, I've been howling, on and off, since five o'clock. I daresay you think I'm a fool," said Gina dolorously.

"No, of course I don't. I'm so sorry for you."

"Thanks, dear. I don't generally say much about things when I feel them," said Miss Ryott pensively, "but I don't mind talking to you, between ourselves, like. Now, Rosie Graham—she's the sarcastic sort—or tries to be. I could never let myself go in front of that girl——"

Gina paused, expressively enough, in lieu of seeking in the barren fields of the shop-girl's range of imagery.

"I know what you mean," said Lydia. She had long ago found out the incalculable value of this sympathetic, and entirely non-committal, form of words.

"You may have noticed that I haven't been exactly what you might call a Sunny Jim lately," said Miss Ryott.

She looked sidelong at Lydia, who turned a deeply interested gaze upon her, but said nothing at all. The echo of Grandpapa's wisdom came back to her, as it so often did: "Always let the other people talk about themselves." And once more it was justified.

Whilst her companion talked, Lydia congratulated herself upon the success of her manœuvre in waiting for Gina, and at the same time impressing upon Madame Elena, ever alert for signs of enthusiasm in the staff, her eager devotion to her work. There was not another employee in the shop who would voluntarily have remained on after hours, apparently from utter absorption in the task on hand.

Lydia marvelled, with perfectly genuine wonder, that none of them should have the wit to see how enormously worth while it was to sacrifice an hour or two of leisure once in a way for the sake of the immense effect that such a display produced upon the authorities.

She never made the mistake of attempting to deceive herself as to her own motives, and was consequently able to estimate to the full the results at which she had consciously aimed.

"You're a perfect dear to have listened to me," said Gina warmly when they parted. "I'm sure I've been the most frightful bore, really."

Lydia assured her that this had not been the case, and was able to do so with the more earnestness that she was inwardly full of exhilaration at the growing conviction that her personality was once more giving her prominence amongst her surroundings.

The next day Marguerite Saxon twice emphatically called her "my dear"—a mark of potential friendship as distinguished from the professional and abstracted "dear," that invariably punctuated the day's intercourse.

She was also required to listen, during the tea interval, to Miss Saxon's version of the recent disturbance.

It need scarcely be said that Lydia's perfectly noncommittal sympathy was extended as freely to Marguerite as it had been to Gina, with the result that each declared a warm liking for her, and she speedily became the central figure in their little world.

Madame Elena was not prone to personal enthusiasms, and the signs that she gave of having distinguished Lydia from among her compeers, were all but imperceptible. Only Lydia's ruthless clear-sightedness

where her own interests were concerned enabled her to discern them.

She soon found that the two young ladies in the millinery were rather looked down upon by the showroom young ladies, who had, indeed, little opportunity for intercourse with them. Nevertheless, Lydia smiled sedulously at them when she said, "Good morning," and never pretended deafness when one or the other of them asked her to "pass along the bread, please," at dinner.

Consequently they were overheard to say to one another that Miss Raymond was the only lady in the place, so far as manners went.

Mrs. Entwhistle was somewhat of the same opinion, since Lydia was the only girl who never grumbled at helping her when Old Madam's unexpected calls led to a sudden demand for afternoon tea.

There remained Miss Rosie Graham.

Lydia was perhaps more nearly afraid of her than she had ever been of any member of her own sex.

To a Cockney sharpness of tongue, Rosie added an almost uncanny power of insight into the minds of her neighbours, and it was commonly asserted amongst the girls that she could "thought-read."

The "thought-reading," Lydia decided, was a trick, based upon natural shrewdness and an almost infallible instinct for the detection of small affectations and insincerities, but it may reasonably be supposed that it added no sense of security to the circles of which Miss Graham was a member.

Lydia knew that Rosie was not, and never would be, popular, but she uneasily surmised in her a strength of character that might equal, if it did not surpass, her own. And the idea was disturbing to Lydia's concep-

tion of her own allotted rôle in life, well to the forefront of the stage.

She was always charming to Miss Graham, in accordance with her invariable rule, but after three months at Madame Elena's she was still vexedly aware that the medium by which the charm could be made efficacious had yet to be discovered.

It was obviously waste of time to say to Rosie, as she might have said to Marguerite Saxon, for instance:

"You do look tired to-day. I'm sure you're not a bit strong."

For, whereas Miss Saxon would have denied the charge, simpering with gratification the while, and at an early opportunity have returned the kindness by some such compliment as, "What a sweet figure that costume gives you, dear. I'm sure you wear lovely corsets," it might safely be assumed that Rosie would shrug her shoulders, and retort matter-of-factly that her pallor was due to indigestion. She frankly disliked personalities, although she was willing enough to give her opinion, uncivilly and often unkindly, although never maliciously, in regard to other people.

Lydia sometimes thought that the only avenue of approach lay in the sense of humour that they shared, and which was deficient in the other members of the small group. And it always gave her an odd sense of reassurance when, in the course of the day, some trivial incident, or chance word, would cause her eyes and those of Rosie Graham to meet, involuntarily and quite instinctively, in a silent laugh.

X

"THERE's only one piece each," said old Miss Lillicrap, in the sharp, fierce squeak that the other boarders always heard with dismayed resentment, rendered powerless because of her extreme age, and the violet tinge that shadowed her hard old lips.

Miss Lillicrap had been known to have a violent and mysterious "attack" for a less reason than the appropriation of a second piece of seed-cake at tea-time on a Sunday afternoon by someone other than herself.

The boarders assembled in the drawing-room instantly entered into the unanimous league of a silent resolution to ignore Miss Lillicrap's indelicate insistence on the extremely limited quantity of cake supplied by Miss Nettleship.

"Meal-time again!" sighed little Mrs. Clarence, at the same time edging her chair forward, so as to sit nearest to the small milk-jug and inadequately-filled sugar-basin. "It always seems to be time to eat, somehow." Her pale, pink-rimmed blue eyes were anxiously scanning the food on the table as she spoke.

"Only one piece each," snapped Miss Lillicrap again, more loudly than before.

Again they all ignored her.

"Who's going to do 'mother,' and pour out?" asked Mrs. Bulteel with a rather nervous laugh.

Everyone knew that as the principal married woman in the room, she felt herself entitled to the office of

dignity. Almost equally well, everyone knew that it would be disputed.

"I thought Miss Forster did that," said old Miss Lillicrap.

Had Miss Forster been present she would certainly have supported Mrs. Bulteel.

"Miss Forster is out, Miss Lillicrap," retorted Mrs. Bulteel, raising her already shrill voice, so as to impress upon Miss Lillicrap that she was old, and must therefore be very deaf as well.

"Oh, all right—all right. Yesterday I was awake nearly all night, the tea was so strong."

"I'll give you the first cup," shrilled Mrs. Bulteel, provided with an excellent excuse for snatching the tea-pot before Mrs. Clarence, who, as a widow, could have no status at all, could put her little be-ringed, claw-like fingers round the handle.

Lydia, who, for reasons connected with her own undoubted popularity at the boarding-house, never took part in the tea-time amenities of the boarders—of which, indeed, she was only witness on occasional Saturday and Sunday afternoons—looked sympathetically at Mr. Bulteel, waiting nervously for the teacups which he habitually handed politely round.

He evidently thought his wife very spirited and clever when she used her shrewish Cockney tongue against the other women.

"Allow me," said he, taking round the cups of strong, black brew. He threw a resentful glance, as he did so, at the Greek gentleman, who never took his share in dispensing these small courtesies. He only stood, as he usually did, in front of the empty fireplace, his hands in his pockets, and his dark eyes roaming sardonically round the room. He was still spoken of

as "the Greek gentleman," since no one had mastered his name. Lydia had listened with interest to various conversations about him, but had derived little information from them. It might be entertaining, but it was not particularly illuminating to hear Mrs. Bulteel say to Mrs. Clarence, as Lydia had heard her say a little while ago, in a very penetrating manner:

"That's not a face I should *trust*."

Mrs. Clarence, who never ventured to differ from anybody, and least of all from Mrs. Bulteel, who had a live husband and son to testify to the fact that she had justified her feminine existence, had only replied doubtfully:

"No? Well, perhaps you're right. What makes you think . . . ?"

"He looks as though he had foreign blood in him." Mrs. Bulteel adduced the damning grounds for her inference with gloomy prescience, which she appeared to think amply justified by the facts that the Greek spoke English with a slight accent, and had a name that even Miss Nettleship only rendered as Mr. M . . . m . . . m.

A little while afterwards the unconquerable Mrs. Bulteel had actually asked him outright, "And do tell me, *how* is your name pronounced?" in a very intelligent way, as though she knew of two or three excellent alternatives.

To which the Greek gentleman had replied, with slightly outspread, olive fingers:

"Just—exactly—as you please."

"But how do *you* say it in your own country?"

"I am not in my own country."

"I know that. You are a foreigner," said Mrs.

Bulteel, much as she might have said, "You are a cannibal." "But if you *were* in your own country?"

Then had replied the Greek gentleman morosely:

"I should have no need to say it at all. It is too well known."

And Mrs. Bulteel, seeing herself defeated, could only cry out in a shaking voice the time-honoured indictment of the English middle classes of whatever is slightly less than blatantly obvious:

"Oh! How sarcastic!"

Nothing could be more evident than that the Greek was indifferent to the charge, or, indeed, to any other that might be proffered against him by his fellow-inmates.

That very Sunday morning had been spent by him in reading a French novel in the drawing-room, whilst almost all the other inmates had decorously attended church.

"Will you keep some tea for Hector?" suggested Mr. Bulteel, as his wife put down the teapot and uncrooked her little finger.

"I have come to an arrangement with the manageress about Hector's tea," retorted Mrs. Bulteel, with a magnificence that seemed inadequate to the cup of strong tea, and slices of bread-and-butter on a thick plate now probably waiting on the kitchen range for Hector's return.

"The poor boy is never much later than half-past five, after all, even on week-days."

Mrs. Clarence and Miss Lillicrap exchanged a look. Everyone knew that the main interest of the senior members of the Bulteel *ménage* was to exercise a rigorous censorship over every unaccounted-for moment of their only son's existence.

It was as a matter of course that everyone present heard the accustomed routine of question and answer gone through by Hector and his parents on the youth's entrance into the drawing-room.

"Is that you, Hector?" said Mrs. Bulteel mildly, as soon as her son had slouched to a seat, and no further doubt of his identity could possibly prevail.

"Have you asked for your tea?" Mr. Bulteel inquired.

"The girl opened the door to me."

Few of the boarders possessed latch-keys, and Hector was not one of these.

"That girl!" exclaimed his mother. "Better ring, and I'll tell her."

Mrs. Clarence looked rather awed. She would never have dared to ring the drawing-room bell for the parlour-maid.

Lydia herself had come in late for tea, and although Mr. Bulteel had handed her a cup, smiling rather apologetically, there was very little left to eat.

"There's no more cake—nothing left!" cried old Miss Lillicrap with a sort of vicious triumph, as Lydia gazed at the empty plates on the table.

Lydia shrugged her shoulders, and Mr. Bulteel said nervously and kindly:

"They will bring you some more, no doubt."

Everybody knew that any such concession to a late arrival was most unlikely, and the effect produced was proportionate when the Greek gentleman, on the arrival of Hector Bulteel's belated cup and saucer, turned to the maid who had brought them in:

"This young lady will want some tea and bread-and-butter, also."

Irene looked astounded.

The Greek gentleman fixed upon her the steady, sardonic gaze of his dark eyes.

"If you please," he said, with the unctuous sibilance that was the only accent marring the perfection of his English speech.

"I'll see what the manageress says," gasped Irene, and they heard her clattering down the stairs.

The boarders exchanged glances, of which Lydia was perfectly aware, and which did not altogether displease her. She knew that they were all waiting curiously to see the outcome of Irene's mission, and the Greek's reception of its almost certain failure. Miss Nettleship had long ago explained to Lydia that she dared not make any difference in her treatment of the boarders.

"You quite understand how it is, dear, I know. The boarders know very well that your aunt is a friend of mine, and so they're sort of on the look-out for any favouring. And it wouldn't do at all, would it, to have any talk made? It would only be disagreeable for both of us—you know how it is, dear."

Irene reappeared at the door, breathless.

"Miss Nettleship's very sorry, there's no more boiling water," she announced defiantly, and disappeared before the Greek gentleman could do more than look at her, which he did as disagreeably as was possible in the time.

"I am sorry," he remarked gravely to the object of his benevolence.

"It doesn't matter," said Lydia, smiling.

"But it's not right," cried Mr. Bulteel, as though sheer distress were compelling him to break into the conversation contrary to his will, and certainly contrary to his usual habit.

"It's not *right*. One pays for tea, and one ought to

have it. She never deducts a meal like tea from the bill, even if one hasn't had it."

His wife tittered shrilly.

"I should think she didn't! It's disgraceful the way that woman charges for the food. No one ever has a second helping."

The room became animated on the instant.

Mr. Bulteel had introduced one of those topics, that, from sheer force of unending discussion in the past, become eagerly acclaimed as suitable for unending discussion in the present.

"I *ask* for a second helping," said old Miss Lillicrap triumphantly. "I *ask* for it. And I get it, too. I had two helpings of the pudding yesterday, and I sent the girl back for some custard. She brought it to me without any custard the second time, but I sent her back for it. It was the disobliging waitress, too, not Irene, and I could see she didn't like it. But she had to go back for the custard, and Miss Nettleship gave it to her. She knew it was for me, and she didn't dare to refuse it."

No one congratulated Miss Lillicrap on her achievement. She was very unpopular, and it was evident that to most of the boarders the recollection sprang to mind vividly of the methods to which she had recourse for the maintenance of her privileges. Indeed, Miss Nettleship had herself told Lydia of her own defeat at the aged but determined hands of Miss Lillicrap, who had once had five cardiac attacks in succession sooner than pay a disputed item on her weekly bill, emerging from each one in order to say, "It's extortionate, and you'll have to take it off. I shan't pay."

When she had said it five times, and showed an iron intention of relapsing into a sixth catalepsy, as a preliminary to saying it again, the manageress had cast

up her eyes to heaven, and exclaimed that the charge should be remitted.

Thereafter Miss Lillicrap had the upper hand, and knew it, and Miss Nettleship was wont to say pleadingly to her other boarders:

"You know what it is—Miss Lillicrap is old, and then with her heart and all——"

They resented it, but they also were powerless before those tiny, gnarled hands, that little puckered face nodding and shaking under a lace cap, and that cracked, envenomed old voice.

"I wish there was less custard and more pudding, very often," said Mr. Bulteel, with a sort of gloomy humorousness. "It's always custard."

"Made with custard powder at that," put in his wife.

"Eggs are so expensive," Mrs. Clarence's habitual little whine contributed to the quota.

"Not that we don't pay enough for her to give us real custard made with eggs," she added hastily, lest it should be thought that she was accustomed to economical shifts.

"Hector," said his mother sharply, "have you finished your tea?"

The youth looked resentfully at his parents.

"Go and do your exercises then, my boy," said his father firmly.

"All right, father, all right."

"Now, go at once, Hector," said Mrs. Bulteel, as she always said every evening when her son manifested reluctance with regard to the enforced physical drill, judged by his parents necessary to the well-being of their weedy offspring.

"The boy gets hardly any exercise," his mother discontentedly informed her neighbour, the Greek, who

contented himself with casting a disparaging eye over Hector's lanky proportions, as though he thought it entirely immaterial whether these were duly developed or not.

"Wonderful thing, those dumb-bell exercises," remarked Mr. Bulteel, shooting a scraggy wrist out of his coat sleeve, and then withdrawing it again hastily, as an unsuccessful advertisement. "Hurry up, my boy."

The door opened again before Hector had responded in any way to the bracing exhortations of his progenitors.

"Miss Forster back again?" said the Greek gentleman. "We shall have our game of Bridge before dinner, then."

"Don't move, don't move!" cried Miss Forster, breezily putting out a protesting hand very tightly fastened into a white kid glove, and thereby obliging Mr. Bulteel to rise reluctantly from his arm-chair.

"Oh, what a shame!"

Miss Forster sank into the vacated seat immediately, with a loud sigh of relief.

"Have you had a pleasant afternoon with your friends?" Mrs. Bulteel inquired. She was always inordinately curious about the social engagements of other people, but Miss Forster's garrulousness needed no questionings.

"A topping afternoon!" she declared with youthful slanginess. "Never held such cards, either. What do you think of eight hearts to the Ace, King, Queen?"

The Greek gentleman, to whom she appealed, was non-committal.

"It depends who was holding them," he replied laconically.

"Well, I was, of course. My partner's deal—he'd

gone no trumps; they doubled, and of course I redoubled, and we made the little slam. Jolly, eh? though I prefer something with *rather* more play in it, myself."

"Such as last night," grimly suggested the Greek, in unkind allusion to an incident that Miss Forster might reasonably be supposed to prefer forgotten.

"Haven't you forgotten that horrid diamond suit of yours yet?" cried the lady, shaking an admonitory forefinger. "It was certainly a slip, and I can't think how I came to make it."

"You took the lead out of your partner's hand," piped Mrs. Clarence, with a sudden display of knowledge that caused Miss Forster, the recognized Bridge expert of the house until the Greek gentleman's recent arrival, to look at her in astonished resentment.

"I'm not a player, I know," hastily said Mrs. Clarence, perhaps in tardy dread lest she also might be reminded of past fiascos. "Only I always remember that my husband's golden rule used to be, 'Third in hand plays his highest, and second in hand plays his lowest.' I've never forgotten that."

Mrs. Clarence's husband was the only claim to superiority which she could flaunt before the better-dressed, better-housed, better-connected, generally better-off pretensions of Miss Forster and she flaunted him freely.

Perhaps it was on this account that no one paid the slightest attention to the *mot* of the departed card-player.

Mrs. Bulteel picked up the *Daily Sketch,* and said without animation, as without any shred of meaning: "Fancy the Duke of Connaught going to Canada!" and Mr. Bulteel suddenly exclaimed in shocked tones:

"*Hector!* You won't have time to do your exercises before dinner if you don't go at once."

The youth slouched from the room.

"Mr. Hector should hold himself better!" cried Miss Forster, who never hesitated to make a remark on the score of its being a personal one. She flung back her shoulders as she spoke.

"My son is growing very fast," said Mrs. Bulteel stiffly.

Miss Forster laughed.

"Well, I must go and take off my hat."

She slightly lifted the brim of her large hat, as though to render her meaning perfectly clear, and left the room.

Mrs. Bulteel's plain, pinched face was further disfigured by a sneer.

"Poor woman!" she said spitefully. "She really can't afford to criticize other people. She gets stouter every day, I do believe."

"Is she really such a very good Bridge-player?" Mrs. Clarence asked, with a sort of restrained eagerness, as though ashamed of hoping—as she quite obviously did—that the answer would be in the negative.

"She plays a fair game—*for* one of your sex," said the Greek ungallantly.

It was such small observations as this, which he let fall from time to time, that made Lydia feel almost certain that she disliked him, although at other times she was gratified by his half-covert admiration of her.

Presently the Bulteels went in pursuit of Hector and his dumb-bells; old Miss Lillicrap tottered off to scream shrilly for hot water from the top of the kitchen stairs, and Mrs. Clarence, glancing at Lydia with a friendly little furtive smirk, sidled out of the room to

engage upon one of those mysterious futilities that served to bridge the gaps in the one regular occupation of her life: her attendance at meals.

Lydia and the Greek were left alone together in the drawing-room.

"The days are drawing in very fast," he observed, gazing at the window.

Lydia felt slightly disappointed at the highly impersonal nature of the remark.

"Yes," she said unenthusiastically.

"Do you find the evenings rather long after you get in from your work? You very seldom join us in the drawing-room, I notice, after dinner."

"Sometimes I go and sew in Miss Nettleship's room, and talk to her," said Lydia.

"Sometimes, no doubt. But are there not evenings when you retire to your own apartment very early?"

Lydia reflected that foreigners no doubt held views unshared by the conventional British mind, as to the propriety of expressing a manifest curiosity in the affairs of other people.

"Sometimes I have writing to do," she said shyly.

The admission was not altogether unpremeditated. Lydia knew that the Greek was an insatiable reader, mostly of French novels, and it had occurred to her some time since that he might not unpossibly be of use in advising her. Besides, she owned to herself quite frankly, that his interest in her was not likely to be diminished by the discovery of her literary ambitions.

"I came to London partly so as to be able to write," she told him. "I have wanted to write books ever since I was a child."

"Ever since you were a child!" he repeated with a hint of friendly derision. "That is indeed a long while.

And what form does this writing of yours take? No doubt you write poetry—all about love, and spring-time, and death?"

Lydia felt herself colouring with annoyance as she replied with decision:

"Dear me, no. I shouldn't think of writing poetry nowadays. I know very well that I can't. But I've written one or two short stories, and I should like one day—to write books."

"Have these stories of yours been published?"

"No, not yet," said Lydia. "I haven't tried to publish them. I don't know if they're the right length, or where to send them, or anything."

"Haven't you ever come across a useful little book called 'The Artist and Author's Handbook?' That would give you all the information you require."

"Would it? I could try and get it," said Lydia doubtfully.

She did not want to spend any extra money. There had proved to be so many unforeseen expenses in London.

"I think I have a copy. Allow me to lend it to you," said the Greek. "It will give you a list of the publishers, and publications, and a great deal of very practical information. You should certainly see it. I will give it to you to-morrow."

"Oh, thank you!"

"In return," said the obliging foreigner, with a slight smile, "may I not be allowed to read one of your tales?"

Lydia, the intuitive, had been mentally anticipating the request. She was eager enough for a verdict upon her work, and only pretended a little modest hesitation.

"I am afraid you wouldn't find them very interesting—but I should like to know if you think there's any hope for me, Mr.——"

"My name is Margoliouth," said he.

No one else had ever been honoured by the information.

Lydia went upstairs, discreetly taking upon herself to break up the *tête-à-tête,* with increased self-satisfaction.

She was less pleased a few days later when she discovered that everybody in the boarding-house now knew that she wrote stories.

"I'm not a bit surprised," Miss Forster cried loudly and joyously. "I always felt we had a lot in common. Why, I should write myself if I could only find the time."

She traced rapid scribbles in the air with her forefinger.

"It must be a great hobby for you," said pale Mr. Bulteel, looking respectfully at Lydia.

"Perhaps one night you'll read us one of your stories," his wife suggested.

She was not usually gracious to the other women in the house, but Lydia had always listened sympathetically to her account of the agony that she suffered from her teeth, now undergoing extensive structural alterations.

Only little Mrs. Clarence gazed at Lydia with a thoroughly uneasy eye.

"I must say," she said with a note of aggression in her habitual whine, "I do hope you won't put *me* into one of your books, Miss Raymond."

Lydia enjoyed the attention that was bestowed upon

her, even while she critically told herself that it lacked discernment.

She did not read her stories out loud to the assembled boarders, as Mrs. Bulteel had suggested, but she submitted several of them to the inspection of Margoliouth.

"They have merit, and originality," he told her. "But your English is not good."

Lydia held out her hand for the manuscripts without replying.

"Aha, you think that a foreigner cannot criticize English," he said acutely, and interpreting her secret thought with perfect correctness. "But I assure you that I am right. Look! you put 'alright' for 'all right' and 'She was very interested' instead of 'she was very much interested.' And again, you have 'under the circumstances' for 'in the circumstances.' All these are common errors. Tell me, what authors do you read?"

Lydia was vague. Like the majority of readers, she chose books almost at random, because the title allured her, or because someone had said that the story was exciting.

The Greek shrugged his shoulders.

"The ideas are there," he said, "but you must learn to express them better."

Lydia felt so much mortified that she could hardly speak. She, the Head of the School at Miss Glover's, the owner of the "mathematical mind" so rarely found in one of her own sex, the responsible and trusted accountant at Elena's, to be told that she could not write English!

At that moment she disliked Margoliouth with all the cordial dislike accorded to a really candid critic.

Yet it was characteristic of Lydia that, even in the

midst of her vexation, she realized that to display it would be to destroy much of the Greek's flattering opinion of her superior intelligence. She drew a long breath, and gazed at him frankly and steadily.

"Thank you very much," she said. "I must try and study the really good writers, and—and I'll remember what you say, and try and write better English. I'm sure you're right."

It was a little set speech, uttered regardless of the indignation still burning within her, and it did not fail of its effect.

"Well done!" cried the Greek softly. "Well done, Miss Raymond! It is very rare to find so much frankness and determination in a lady, if I may say so—I am the more sure that you will eventually succeed."

Lydia thanked him and took away her manuscripts.

She was inwardly just as angry at his criticism as she had been on first hearing it, and just as certain that a foreigner could know nothing about the correctness or otherwise of her English. But she congratulated herself on the presence of mind and strength of will which had enabled her to make so good a show of open-minded generosity. Quite evidently Margoliouth thought the better of her for it, and Lydia would not for the world have forfeited his admiration.

It gave her great *prestige* in the eyes of the other boarders.

Lydia knew that they most of them liked her, Mr. Bulteel because she was young and pretty, his wife, and whining little Mrs. Clarence, because she always listened to them sympathetically, all the while inwardly mindful of Grandpapa's rule—*"Always let the other people talk about themselves."*

Miss Forster liked her too.

Lydia did not exactly flatter Miss Forster, but she had a tactful way of introducing the topic of Miss Forster's great friends, Sir Rupert and Lady Honoret, and was always ready to hear about the Bridge parties that Miss Forster frequented at their house in Lexham Gardens.

Hector Bulteel, the pallid youth whose days were passed in Gower Street, had at first been too shy even to speak to Lydia, but one day she asked for his advice on a point of accountancy, and thereafter they occasionally discussed the higher mathematics or the distinctions between organic and inorganic chemistry.

Lydia did not really think very highly of Hector's capabilities, but criticized him as shrewdly as she did everyone else with whom she came into contact.

She was always careful, however, to keep her rather caustic judgments to herself, and she knew that both at Madame Elena's and at the boarding-house the reputation that had been hers at school still prevailed: Lydia Raymond never said an unkind thing about anyone.

Even old Miss Lillicrap, who seldom uttered a word that was not either spiteful or complaining, looked at Lydia in a comparatively friendly silence on the evening that the Greek gentleman first took her to the Polytechnic.

Lydia wore a new, pale-pink blouse, and her best dark-brown cloth coat and skirt.

For the first time, she decided that she really *was* pretty.

The conviction lent exhilaration to the evening's entertainment, which on the whole she found rather dull. She was not very much amused by the cinematograph

films displayed, and when, towards the end of the evening, Mr. Margoliouth fumbled for her hand in the darkness and held it, Lydia was principally conscious that hers was still sticky from the chocolates that he had given her, and failed to derive any thrill from the experience.

XI

TOWARDS Christmas time, as the evenings became shorter and shorter, Mr. Margoliouth developed great concern at the idea of Lydia's coming back from her work alone.

Might he call for her at Madame Elena's, and escort her home?

Lydia thanked him very much, and said that one of her fellow-workers generally came most of the way with her. But she was not insensible to the flattering vista thus opened.

The girls at Elena's would be, in their own parlance, thrilled if a foreign and interesting-looking male should make his appearance outside the little shop and await there the privilege of accompanying Miss Raymond across the Park.

Gina Ryott boasted a "gentleman friend" who occasionally paid her the same compliment, and Lydia, as well as Marguerite Saxon, had peeped through the closed shutters of the shop window more than once, in order to watch them depart together.

And not only the girls but the community at the boarding-house would be full of interest and excitement.

Already Lydia knew perfectly well that Miss Forster and Mrs. Bulteel exchanged significant glances whilst she and the Greek talked to one another at meals.

In the trivial monotony of the boarding-house existence, she even felt certain that Mr. Margoliouth and

his increasingly-marked attentions to herself were the chief subjects of discussion.

She began to enjoy her position very much, and no longer held Mr. Margoliouth at a distance. She was not at all in love with him, but his attentions were very agreeable and certainly, Lydia told herself, he had enough discernment to realize that she was not a person with whom liberties might be taken.

As a fact, his manner towards her was respectful enough except for a certain tendency towards patting her wrist, or attracting her attention by a lingering touch upon her arm or her shoulder.

When they went to a theatre or a cinematograph, he always held her hand, and a curious sense of fair play in return for his hospitality induced Lydia to allow this, and even feebly to return an occasional pressure of her fingers, although she derived no slightest satisfaction from the contact.

The rapid development of her mentality had so far out-distanced other, more human attributes of youth, that she frequently debated within herself whether Mr. Margoliouth was ever likely to try and kiss her. If so, Lydia reflected with cold self-righteousness, she would rebuke him in such fashion that he would respect and admire her more than ever. She was full of instinctive horror at the idea of "making herself cheap," and it had been inculcated into her both by Aunt Beryl and Aunt Evelyn that to do so was to invite disaster of some unspecified but terrible kind.

When her Christmas holiday was approaching—two days and a half which she was to spend at Regency Terrace—Lydia began to mention the Greek occasionally in her weekly letter to Aunt Beryl.

She was not averse from some slight exploitation of

her first conquest, and moreover she thought it quite likely that a hint might reach Aunt Beryl any day through Miss Nettleship, and she wisely preferred to secure herself against any charge of secretiveness.

At first Aunt Beryl only wrote back, "Glad you enjoyed yourself at the Polytechnic, dear; mind and not take cold coming out from those hot places this bitter weather." Then later: "This Mr. Margoliouth seems very attractive. Don't let him break your little heart, dear!"

The two notes of exclamation denoted Aunt Beryl's humorous intention, as Lydia well knew. But one day she wrote more seriously.

"I must say it would be a real pleasure to hear you were properly engaged, providing it was to some really nice fellow. Don't be in a hurry to decide though, dear —you're very young."

Lydia herself had hardly contemplated the possibility of an engagement. But now she began to wonder whether or no any such idea held a place in Margoliouth's mind. He had certainly said that he should like to show her his own country, and told her how much she would enjoy a sea voyage and how greatly the new experience of travelling would help her to write.

Meanwhile he continued to take her out two or three times a week, and to give her expensive boxes of chocolates and occasional books.

The girls at Madame Elena's became aware of him, and chaffed Lydia agreeably, and at the boarding-house Miss Forster, always outspoken, one day asked whether she had ordered her wedding-dress yet.

Lydia did not like Miss Forster's blatancy, but her old predilection for finding herself the heroine of her

surroundings was stronger than ever, and it gratified her to know that they were all watching her and wondering what would happen to her next.

A less agreeable manifestation of interest was, however, in store for her.

Miss Nettleship sought her out apologetic but conscientious.

"You know how it is, dear, I know—but really I do feel responsible to your auntie, just a wee bit—and I feel I really must say something. They're all talking about it, you know—not saying anything, I don't mean of course, but you know—just talking, like."

The distinction that Miss Nettleship wished to imply between the saying of anything and mere talking about it, was perfectly clear to the resentful and embarrassed Lydia.

True to her instincts, however, she showed none of the resentment and as little as she could of the embarrassment.

"There really isn't anything for anyone to talk about. Mr. Margoliouth is very fond of the theatre, he says, and he hasn't anyone to go with him. It's very kind of him to take me, I think."

"Once here and there," said Miss Nettleship distractedly, "but really, dear, it's getting more than that, and of course it's a bit conspicuous because of his never hardly taking any notice of anyone else. At the Bridge now, when they play in the evenings, he's downright uncivil to poor Mrs. Clarence, and I've heard him very rude to Miss Forster too, though of course she's well able to hold her own. But it makes it all the more marked, his going on the way he does with you."

"I can't help his liking me," said Lydia meekly, but

inwardly rather gratified at Miss Nettleship's artless exposition of the distinction that she enjoyed.

"Now don't go thinking I'm blaming you for an instant, dear. I know very well that your auntie's brought you up to be careful, and, besides, I can see for myself you're steady—not one of those girls I call regular *flirts*. But it's your being so young, and there's something else too."

Miss Nettleship hesitated, her pleasant, anxious-looking face much discomposed.

"Really I oughtn't to say anything about it to you, but you do understand how it is, dear—I feel the responsibility of having you here, and your auntie being such a friend of mine and everything, I feel I can't let it go on and not say anything."

"I've written to Aunt Beryl all about Mr. Margoliouth, you know," said Lydia quickly.

She felt the announcement to be a trump card, and was surprised that Miss Nettleship's harassed expression did not relax.

"I was sure you would, dear—it isn't that. You see the fact is, though I oughtn't to mention it but I know you can be trusted never to pass it on,—the fact is that Mr. Margoliouth, as he calls himself, isn't altogether sound, and I don't know that I shan't have to ask him to leave."

"Why?" cried Lydia, astonished.

But Miss Nettleship had her own methods of imparting information, and was not to be hustled out of them.

"Of course you know how it is in a place like this—one has to be very particular, and I've always asked for references and everything, and there's never been any trouble except just once, right at the start. That

was with foreigners, too, a pair of Germans, and called themselves brother and sister. However, that's nothing to do with you, dear, and I had to send them packing very quickly—in fact, the minute I had any doubts at all. It's the ruin of a place like this ever to let it get a name, as you can imagine, and the fright I got then made me more particular than ever. This fellow Margoliouth gave me a City reference, and another a clergyman somewhere up in Yorkshire, and paid his first week in advance. And since then it's just been one put off after another."

"But how—what do you mean, Miss Nettleship?"

"He's not paying his way," said the manageress, fixing her brown eyes compassionately upon Lydia's face.

"He asked me to let him have his account monthly, as it was more convenient, and I gave in, although it's not my rule, and I wouldn't have that old Miss Lillicrap—you know what she is, dear, and how one can't go against her—I wouldn't have her hear about it for the world. Well, it was seven weeks before he paid me the first month, and I had to ask him for it again and again. He said there was some difficulty about getting his money from Greece paid into the Bank here. However, he paid in the end, but since then it's been nothing but putting off and putting off—would I let it stand over for a week because it wasn't convenient, and so on and so on. I told him he'd have to get his meals out if it went on, and then he gave me something on account —but not a third of what he owes me, dear. I really don't know what to do about it. He's so plausible, I half believe it's all right when he's talking to me, but I can't afford to go on like this. He'll have to go if he hasn't paid in full at the end of this week. And how

I'm to get the money back if he doesn't pay up I really don't know, for a prosecution would be a fearful business for me, and lose me every boarder in the place."

"Oh, it would be dreadful!" cried Lydia, sincerely shocked. "But he *must* pay. I thought of him as quite rich."

"So you might, from the way he goes on. And the bills that are always coming for him, too!" said Miss Nettleship.

"I can't help seeing them, you know, when I clear the box in the mornings. However, he says there's money coming to him from Greece, and it's only got to be put into his Bank over here, and he can promise me a cheque on Saturday at latest. So I'm not saying any more till then, but *after* that my mind's made up. But you'll understand, dear, why I felt I had to speak to you about it first."

Lydia felt that she understood only too well, and she went to business next morning in so thoughtful a mood that Rosie Graham, whose observation nothing escaped, made sharp inquiry of her as they snatched a ten minutes' tea-interval in the afternoon: "What's up that you're going about with a face as long as a fiddle?"

In the midst of her perfectly real preoccupation, it was not in Lydia to fail to perceive her opportunity for at last arousing a tardy interest in Miss Graham.

"I'm worried," she said frankly.

"Worry won't mend matters," quoted Rosie tritely, but Lydia reaped the advantage of her invariable abstention from the airing of daily minor grievances such as the other girls brought to their work, in the instant acceptance of her statement shown by the astute little Cockney.

"Come round to my place for a yarn this evening," she suggested. "My pal's out and I can find some food, I daresay, though it won't be seven courses and a powdered footman behind the chair, like that place of yours."

Lydia accepted, and felt flattered. No one else had ever been asked to Rosie's place.

They took a Sloane Street omnibus at six o'clock, and got out at Sloane Square, where Lydia made use of a public telephone to inform Miss Nettleship that she would not be in to supper, and then Rosie led her through a very large square, a mews, and into a little street called Walton Street. They crossed it, and entered Ovington Street.

"Number ninety-one A," said Miss Graham, producing a latch-key.

She took Lydia to the top of the house, and Lydia was astounded at the lightness and airiness of the fair-sized room, with a much smaller one opening out of it, evidently in use as a dressing-room.

"Not so dusty, is it?" Rosie said complacently. "This sofa turns into a bed, and there's another proper bed in the other room. The whole thing—unfurnished—costs us twenty-two and six a week, and includes everything except the use of the gas. There's a penny-in-the-slot machine for that. We do most of our cooking on the gas-ring, but the landlady's very decent about sometimes letting us use the kitchen fire."

She gave Lydia a supper of sausage-rolls, bread-and-butter, cocoa and a variety of sweet cakes and biscuits, and all the time talked more agreeably and less causti-cally than Lydia had ever heard her talk before.

When the little meal was over and the table pushed

out of the way, Rosie made Lydia draw her chair close to the tiny oil-stove.

"There's a gas-fire," she said frankly, "but we don't use it unless the weather's simply perishing. It's rather an expensive luxury. Sure you're all right like that?"

"Yes, thank you. What a lot of heat this thing gives out!"

"Doesn't it? Well, now," said Miss Graham abruptly, "spit it out. What's all the trouble? Is it anything to do with that foreign freak who stands about waiting for you outside Elena's of an evening sometimes?"

Lydia was too well inured to the shop-girl vocabulary to resent this description of her admirer.

She decided that she would allow herself the luxury of contravening Grandpapa's rule, and for once talk about herself, justified in doing so by her conviction that it was the only short cut to the rousing in Miss Rosie Graham of that interest which Lydia still desired the more keenly from the very ease with which she could command it in others.

She told her story, but omitted all mention of Miss Nettleship's confidences.

"My aunt, who brought me up, knows a little about it—I wrote and told her he was taking me out sometimes—and she said in a letter I had from her the other day that it would be so nice if I got engaged. Somehow, you know, I hadn't really thought of that before. But I've been rather worried since, wondering whether perhaps he means to ask me. If so, I suppose I oughtn't to let him go about with me quite so much unless I make up my mind to say 'yes.'"

Lydia was aware that she had stated her problem one-sidedly, for her real preoccupation was whether or

no Margoliouth was going to pay her the compliment of a proposal. But the temptation to represent herself as merely undecided if she should become engaged to him or not, was irresistible.

She thought that Rosie looked at her rather curiously as she finished speaking.

"Of course, if you're always about with him and let him give you presents and all the rest of it, the poor Johnnie's bound to think you mean business," she said slowly. "But you'd better be careful, kid. Are you so sure that he wants to marry you?"

Lydia felt herself colouring hotly, sufficiently understanding the older girl's implication to resent it.

"I should think Mr. Margoliouth is too much of a man of the world not to see for himself the sort of girl *I* am," she said haughtily.

"He can see for himself that you're only a silly kid, if that's what you mean," retorted the outspoken Rosie Graham. "Tell me, where does this Margoliouth, or whatever he calls himself, come from? He's as black as my hat, anyway."

Lydia began to wish that she had never embarked upon the path of confidences at all.

"He is Greek," she said very stiffly.

"That might mean anything," retorted Miss Graham sweepingly. "I tell you frankly that's what I don't like about the business—his being such a rum colour. I don't trust black fellows."

"You talk as though he were a nigger!" said Lydia, furious.

"I know what I'm talking about. I knew a girl once who took up with a fellow like that. He wasn't a bit darker than your Margoliouth, and he talked awfully good English, and she got herself engaged to him. He

said he was a prince, and frightfully rich, and he gave her all sorts of presents, and when he had to go back to his own country he sent her the money for her passage so she could come out next year and get married to him. Well, she got everything ready—heaps of clothes and things—and was always talking of how she was going to be a princess, and he'd promised to meet her at a place called Port Said with his own carriage and horses and all the rest of it. Some of us thought she was taking a bit of a risk, but she didn't care a scrap, and was just wild to get out there. Well, off she went—and we didn't hear anything more about her, or get any of the letters and photographs and things she'd promised to send. And then three months later, I met her in the City, where I was matching silks for old Peroxide, and she'd sneaked back to her old firm and got them to take her back as typist again."

"But what had happened?"

"She didn't tell me, and I didn't ask her. But she told another girl, and I heard about it afterwards. She'd gone off on the ship all right, with all her fine new luggage and the rest of it, and she'd told all the people on board who she was going out to marry, and most of them said what a fool she was, and it would be an awful life for an English girl, and she'd never be allowed to come home again. But there was one man on board—a parson—who simply wouldn't let her alone about it, and said she didn't know what she was doing, and at last he got her to promise that she wouldn't actually marry this chap until he'd made inquiries about him. And he did the minute they arrived—although the fellow was there just as he'd said, with a great carriage and two horses, to take her away. I don't exactly know what happened, but

this clergyman fellow went straight off to some British Consul or someone, and they found out all about the man straight away. He *was* a sort of prince all right, and quite as rich as he'd said—though he didn't live in a palace, but some place right away from everywhere—but he wasn't a Christian—and *he'd got two native wives already.*"

"Oh!" Lydia gasped involuntarily at the climax of the narrative, which came upon her inexperience as a complete shock.

"So that was the end of *that,* as you can imagine," said Miss Graham. "The clergyman was awfully good to her, and paid her passage home again out of his own pocket, because she hadn't got a sixpence. Poor kid, she was fearfully cut up, though as a matter of fact she ought to have been off her head with thankfulness that she got stopped in time. I don't suppose she'd ever have got away again, once he'd taken her off in his carriage and pair."

"It must have been awful for her, going back to her old job, after leaving it to get married like that," said Lydia. She thought with horror of the humiliation that it would mean for the victim to return, in such circumstances, to those who had doubtless heard her triumphant boasts of emancipation on leaving.

"D'you think that would be the worst of it?" queried Miss Graham sharply.

Lydia, failing to see the drift of the question, answered unhesitatingly:

"Yes, I think it would. It's the part *I* should have minded most."

A guilty remembrance flashed across her mind of yet another axiom of Grandpapa's—"Don't refer everything back to yourself."

She wished that she had remembered it earlier, when Rosie looked at her strangely, and then said:

"I believe you *would* mind that most—what other people would say and think about you, I mean. What an inhuman kid you are!"

Lydia felt almost more bewildered than offended.

"Isn't there anybody you care for beside yourself?" said Rosie Graham slowly. "I've been watching you ever since you came to us. Of course you're very clever, and a cut above the rest of us—I know all that—and you're awfully sweet and nice to everybody, and never say cattish things about anyone—but what's it all *for?* You don't care a damn for anybody that I can see. And then you talk about this chap who's going with you—this Margoliouth—and whether he wants you to be engaged or not. And I don't believe you've once thought whether you could care for him, or he for you. Why, this girl I was telling you about was crazy about her fellow. *That* was what broke her up—not the having made a fool of herself, and wondering if the others at her old shop weren't laughing at her. But that's simply beyond you, isn't it? I don't believe you know what caring for anybody means."

The two girls looked at one another in silence.

Rosie's accusation not only came as a shock to Lydia, but it carried with it an inward conviction that was disconcerting in the extreme.

Lydia, no coward, faced the unpalatable truth, and instinctively and instantly accepted it as such.

She wondered, with the curious analytical detachment characteristic of the self-centred, that she had never seen it for herself. It vexed her that it should have been left to little Rosie Graham's penetration to enlighten her.

She rallied her forces. Rosie should at least see in her the saving grace of a courageous candour.

"Perhaps that's true," she said slowly. "I've been first with one set of people, and then with another, since I was a small child, and perhaps I've got into a calculating way of just trying to please them, so that they should be nice to me. I don't know that I'm really particularly fond of any of them. . . ."

She passed in mental review as she spoke those with whom her short life had been most nearly connected.

Her parents.

She could hardly remember her father, and she had certainly never loved her mother, weak where Lydia, at twelve years old, was already hard, irrationally impulsive where Lydia was calculating, sentimental where Lydia was contemptuous. Looking back, she realized that her mother had done her best to make Lydia as feebly emotional as she was herself, and that Lydia's own clear-sightedness had not only saved her, but had also forced upon her a very thorough reaction.

Grandpapa — Aunt Beryl — Uncle George — she thought of them all. Certainly she was fond of them in a way, and Grandpapa she most sincerely admired and respected, more than anyone she knew.

She was grateful to Aunt Beryl and Uncle George, and anxious to do them credit, but her interest in their welfare was not excessive. If she heard of their deaths that evening, Lydia knew very well that her chief pang would be remorse for a complete absence of acute sorrow.

There was Nathalie Palmer.

At school, Nathalie had adored her. She still wrote her long, intimate letters full of personal details which

Lydia could not help thinking rather trivial and unnecessary.

But because one criticized, that did not preclude a certain degree of affection. Lydia was certainly fond of Nathalie.

She did not for an instant, however, pretend either to herself or to Rosie Graham, that the latter's words were unjustified by fact.

"I'm certainly not at all in love with Mr. Margoliouth now," she said, "but there's no reason why I shouldn't be later on, I suppose. And because it's more or less true that I've never cared a very great deal for anybody so far, it doesn't follow that I never shall. I'm not twenty yet."

"I suppose there's hope for you," said Rosie Graham grudgingly. "But I'm very sorry for you when you once *do* begin to care for somebody—I don't mind who it may be."

Lydia was conscious of feeling rather flattered by the interpretation she put upon the words.

"I suppose that all one's eggs in one basket is always a risk," she said, not without complacency.

Rosie gave a short, staccato laugh, and again shot one of her disconcerting glances at her visitor.

"What *I* mean is that you'll do it so jolly badly. You've never cared for anybody but yourself, and you won't even know how to begin."

"Then you had better be sorry for the person I care for," said Lydia drily.

She was in reality very angry, and she rose to go for fear of betraying it.

"I daresay it's rather beastly of me to have said that, when I've asked you here to spend the evening," said Rosie with a certain compunction in her voice.

"I'm very glad you said what you thought," Lydia returned calmly. "Good night, and thanks for having me."

"Good night. And I say—*don't* do anything in a hurry about that coloured friend of yours."

Lydia walked downstairs and out of the front door without deigning any reply to this last, urgent piece of advice.

As she sat in the jolting, nearly empty omnibus that was to take her as far as Southampton Row, she reviewed Rosie Graham's speeches of the evening.

It was quite true, Lydia supposed, that she did not really care for anybody but herself. She was too clear-sighted to pretend that this distressed her. On the contrary, she realized the immense simplification of a life into which no seriously conflicting claims could enter.

After all it had taken the almost uncanny acumen of a Rosie Graham to discover the fundamental egotism that underlay all Lydia's careful courtesy and studied kindness of word and deed.

She was annoyed that Rosie should have so poor an opinion of her, but Rosie was only one person; and though in Lydia's present surroundings she held rank of high importance, the importance was merely relative.

The day would come when Rosie Graham, and what Rosie Graham thought, whether true or otherwise, would matter not at all to Lydia Raymond.

XII

NEVERTHELESS, Rosie Graham's anecdote of the girl who had gone to Port Said, and her vehement advice to have nothing to do with the Greek, continued to haunt Lydia's mind.

Neither had she forgotten Miss Nettleship's warning, and the sense that the manageress was watching her with melancholy anxiety caused her to surmise that Mr. Margoliouth had not yet made good his assurance of payment.

She refused an invitation to go to the play with him, but was too anxious that the boarders should continue to look upon her as the heroine of an exciting love-affair to discourage him altogether, although she had really made up her mind that she should not care to be engaged to Margoliouth.

If the first man who had made her acquaintance since she left school showed so much tendency to make love to her, Lydia shrewdly told herself, there would certainly be others. She could well afford to wait, in the certainty of eventually finding a man who would possess such attractions and advantages as the Greek could not boast.

Meanwhile, Margoliouth made life interesting, and Lydia a subject of universal observation and discussion.

She was feeling agreeably conscious of this on the Saturday following her conversation with the mana-

geress, as she came into the boarding-house in time for the midday meal.

Miss Nettleship was hovering at the foot of the stairs and failed to return Lydia's smile.

"He'll have to go," she said without preliminary. "I got his cheque, and the Bank has returned it. You see how it is, dear—a terrible business. I don't know whether I shan't have to call the police in even now before I get my money. He's leaving on Monday, and if I've not had the cash down from him, I don't know what'll happen, I'm sure."

"Oh, Miss Nettleship, how dreadful! I *am* sorry for you," said Lydia, giving expression to the surface emotion of her mind only, from habit and instinct alike.

"Don't you have anything more to do with him, dear," said Miss Nettleship distractedly. "That Agnes is letting something burn downstairs. I can smell it as plain as anything. I'll have to go. Poor old Agnes! she means well but you quite understand how it is——"

The manageress hastened down the stairs to the basement.

Lydia could not help glancing at her neighbour in the dining-room with a good deal of anxiety. He seemed quite imperturbable, and said nothing about his departure.

Lydia, whose opinion of Miss Nettleship's mentality was not an exalted one, began to think that Mr. Margoliouth knew quite well that he could pay his bills before Monday, and had no intention of going away at all.

Otherwise, why was he not more uneasy? Far from uneasy, Margoliouth seemed to be livelier than usual, paid Lydia one or two small compliments with his usual half-condescending, half-sardonic expression, and

asked her if she would come out to tea with him that afternoon.

Miss Nettleship was on one of her periodical excursions to the kitchen, and Miss Forster, Mrs. Clarence, and Mrs. Bulteel were listening with all their ears, and with as detached an expression as each could contrive to assume.

"Thank you very much, I should like to," said Lydia demurely.

They went to a newly-opened corner shop in Piccadilly, where a small orchestra was playing, and little shaded pink lights stood upon all the tables. The contrast with the foggy December dusk outside struck pleasantly upon Lydia's imagination, and she enjoyed herself, and was talkative and animated.

Margoliouth stared at her with his unwinking black gaze, and when they had finished tea he left his chair, and came to sit beside her on the low plush sofa, that had its back to the wall.

"A girl like you shouldn't go about London alone," he suddenly remarked, with a sort of unctuousness. "At least, not until she knows something about life."

"Oh, I can take care of myself," said Lydia hastily.

"But you don't know the dangers that a young girl of your attraction is exposed to," he persisted. "You don't know what sort of brutes men can be, do you?"

"No girl need ever be annoyed—unless she *wants* to be," quoted Lydia primly from Aunt Beryl's wisdom.

"You think so, do you? Now, I wonder if you'll still say that in three years' time. Do you know that you are the sort of woman to make either a very good saint or a very good sinner?"

The world-old lure was too potent for Lydia's youth and her vanity.

"Am I?" she said eagerly. "Sometimes I've thought that, too."

The Greek put his hand upon her, slipping his arm through hers in his favourite manner.

"Tell me about your little self, won't you?" he said ingratiatingly.

"Always let the other people talk about themselves."

Oh, inconvenient and ill-timed recollection of Grandpapa's high, decisive old voice! So vividly was it forced upon the ear of Lydia's unwilling memory that she could almost have believed herself at Regency Terrace once more. The illusion checked her eager, irrepressible grasp at the opportunity held out by the foreigner. The game was spoilt.

"There's nothing to tell," she said abruptly, suddenly grown weary.

Grandpapa had said that long stories about oneself always bored other people, whether or no they politely affected an appearance of interest.

No doubt it was true.

Lydia knew that she herself was not apt to take any very real interest, for instance, in Nathalie Palmer's long letters about her home, and the parish, and the new experiment of keeping hens at the vicarage, nor in the many stories, all of them personal, told by the girls at Elena's, nor even in the monotonous recital of Miss Nettleship's difficulties with her servants.

Why should the Greek be interested in hearing Lydia's opinion of Lydia?

She cynically determined that it would not be worth while to put him to the test.

"Let's go home," she said.

Margoliouth raised his eyebrows.

"I suppose that all women are capricious."

His use of the word "women," as applied to her nineteen-year-old self, always insensibly flattered Lydia.

She let him take her back to the Bloomsbury boarding-house in a hansom, and remained passive, although unresponsive, when he put his arm round her, and pressed her against him in the narrow confinement of the cab.

"Dear little girl!" sighed Margoliouth sentimentally, as he reluctantly released her from his clasp when the cab stopped.

Lydia ran up the steps, agreeably surprised at the instant opening of the door, and anxious to exchange the raw and foggy atmosphere outside for the comparative warmth and light of the hall.

The dining-room door also stood open, and as Lydia came in Miss Forster rushed out upon her.

"I've been waiting for you!" she cried effusively. "Come in here, my dear, won't you?"

"Into the dining-room?" said Lydia, amazed. "Why, there's no fire there! I'm going upstairs."

"No, no," said Miss Forster still more urgently, and laying a tightly-gloved white-kid hand on Lydia's arm. "There's someone up there."

She pointed mysteriously to the ceiling.

Lydia looked up, bewildered, but only saw Miss Nettleship, the gas-light shining full on her pale, troubled face, hastening down the stairs. She passed Lydia and Miss Forster unperceiving, and went straight up to the Greek, who had just closed the street door behind him.

"Mr. Margoliouth!" she said, in her usual breathless fashion. "You see how it is—it's quite all right, I'm sure . . . but your wife has come. She's in the drawing-room."

Margoliouth uttered a stifled exclamation, and then went upstairs without another word.

Miss Forster almost dragged Lydia into the dining-room.

"There! Of course you didn't know he was married, did you? Neither did any of us, and I must say I think he's behaved abominably."

"But who is she? When did she come?" asked Lydia, still wholly bewildered at the suddenness of the revelation.

"Sit down, and I'll tell you all about it."

Miss Forster settled her ample person in a chair, with a general expression of undeniable satisfaction.

"Just about half an hour after you'd left the house, I was just wondering if I should find dear Lady Honoret at home if I ran round—you know my great friends, Sir Rupert and Lady Honoret. I'm sure I've often mentioned them; they're quite well-known people—but I thought, of course, there wouldn't be a chance of finding them disengaged—she's always *somewhere*—so Mrs. Bulteel and I were settling down to a nice, cosy time over the fire. Irene had actually made up quite a good fire, for once. And then the door opened"—Miss Forster flung open an invisible portal with characteristic energy—"and in comes Miss Nettleship—and I remember thinking to myself at the time, in a sort of flash, you know: Miss Nettleship looks *pale*—a sort of startled look—it just flashed through my mind. And this woman was just behind her."

"What is she like?"

Lydia was conscious of disappointment and humiliation, but she was principally aware of extreme curiosity.

"Just what you'd expect," said Miss Forster, with a decisiveness that somehow mitigated the extremely cryptic nature of the description. "The moment I saw her and realized who she was—and I'm bound to say Miss Nettleship spoke her name *at once*—that moment I said to myself that she was just what I should have expected her to be."

Lydia, less eager for details of Miss Forster's remarkable prescience than for further information, still looked at her inquiringly.

"Dark, you know," said Miss Forster. "Very dark —and stout."

She described a circle of immense and improbable width. "Older than he is, I should say—without a doubt. And wearing a white veil, and one of those foreign-looking black hats tilted right over her eyes—you know the sort of thing. And boots—buttoned boots. With a check costume—exactly like a foreigner."

"I suppose she *is* a foreigner."

"I spoke in French at once," said Miss Forster. "It was most awkward, of course—and I could see that Mrs. Bulteel was completely taken aback. Not much *savoir faire* there, between ourselves, is there? But, of course, as a woman of the world, I spoke up at once, the moment Miss Nettleship performed the introduction. *'Comment vous trouvez-vous, M'dahme?'* I said. Of course, not shaking hands—simply bowing."

"What did she say?" Lydia asked breathlessly, as Miss Forster straightened herself with a little gasp, after a stiff but profound inclination of her person from the waist downwards.

"She answered in English. She has an accent, of course—doesn't speak nearly as well as he does. Something about us knowing her husband. 'Do you mean Mr. Margoliouth?' I said. Naughty of me, though, wasn't it?"

"Yes, very," said Lydia hastily. "But what did she say?"

"Took it quite seriously," crowed Miss Forster, suddenly convulsed. "Really, some people have *no* sense of the ludicrous. I said it for a bit of mischief, you know. 'Do you mean Mr. Margoliouth?' I said—and she answered me quite solemnly, 'Yes, of course.' "

Then it really was Margoliouth's wife. Lydia began to realize the fact that until now had carried no sort of conviction to her mind.

Margoliouth, a married man, had been making a fool of her before all these people. Such was the aspect of her case that flashed across her with sudden, furious indignation.

She perceived that Miss Forster was looking at her with curiosity.

"I didn't know that he was married at all," said Lydia calmly.

"No one could have guessed it for a moment, and he never gave us a hint," said Miss Forster indignantly. "You won't mind me saying, dear, that I wanted to get you in here and tell you quietly before you went up and found her there, sitting on the sofa as calm as you please."

"Thank you," said Lydia. "But really, you know, it doesn't matter to me if Mr. Margoliouth *is* married. Only I think he ought to have told Miss Nettleship, and—and all of us."

"The cad!" cried Miss Forster energetically, and

striking the rather tight lap of her silk dress with a violence that threatened to split the white-kid glove. "What we women have to put up with, I always say! Only a man could behave like that, and what can we do to defend ourselves? Nothing at all. I was telling Sir Rupert Honoret the other day—those friends of mine who live in Lexham Gardens, you know—I was telling him what I thought of the whole sex. Oh, I've the courage of my opinions, I know. Men are brutes—there's no doubt about it."

"I suppose he didn't expect her here?" said Lydia dreamily, still referring to the Margoliouth *ménage*.

Miss Forster understood.

"Not he! You saw what a fool he looked when the manageress told him she was here. She's come to fetch him away, that's what it is. She as good as said so. But they'll be here till Monday morning, I'm afraid—the pair of them. Ugh!——" Miss Forster gave a most realistic shudder. "I don't know how I shall sit at table with them. Miss Nettleship has no business to take in people of that sort—she ought to have made inquiries about the man in the first place, and I shall tell her so."

"Oh, no," said Lydia gently. "Please don't. She'll be so upset at the whole thing already."

"Very generous!" Miss Forster declared, her hand pressed heavily on Lydia's shoulder. "Of course, it's you one can't help thinking of—a young girl like you. Oh, the cad! If I were a man, I'd horsewhip a fellow like that."

She indulged in a vigorous illustrative pantomime.

"I shall be all right," Lydia said quickly—insensibly adopting the most dignified attitude at her command.

She moved to the door.

"Have some supper sent up to your room, do," urged Miss Forster. "I'm sure Irene would get a tray ready, and I'll bring it up to you myself. Then you won't have to come down to the dining-room."

"Thank you very much, but I'd rather come down."

Lydia was speaking literal truth, as, with her usual clear-sightedness, she soon began to realize.

Not only was her curiosity undeniably strong, both to behold the recent arrival, and to observe Margoliouth's behaviour in these new and undoubtedly disconcerting circumstances—but it was slowly borne in upon her that she could not afford to relinquish the opportunity of standing in the lime-light with the attention of her entire audience undeviatingly fixed upon herself.

Her humiliation could be turned into a triumph.

Lydia set her teeth.

She had been very angry with Margoliouth, and was so still—less because he had deceived her than because the discovery of his deceit must destroy all her prestige as the youthful recipient of exclusive attentions. But after all, she could still be the heroine of this boarding-house drama.

Lydia reflected grimly that there were more ways than one of being a heroine.

She looked at herself in the glass. Anger and excitement had given her a colour, and she did not feel at all inclined to cry. She was, in fact, perfectly aware that she was really not in the least unhappy. But the people downstairs would think that she was proudly concealing a broken heart.

Lydia dressed her thick mass of hair very carefully, thrust the high, carved comb into one side of the great

black twist at just the right angle, and put on a blouse of soft, dark-red silk that suited her particularly well.

There was a knock at her door.

Lydia went to open it, and saw Miss Nettleship on the threshold.

"Oh, my dear, I am so sorry, and if you want a tray upstairs for this once, it'll be quite all right, and I'll give the girl the order myself. You aren't thinking of coming down to-night, are you?"

"Yes, I am," said Lydia steadily. "It's very kind of you, but I'd rather come down just as usual."

"It's as you like, of course," said the manageress in unhappy accents. "Miss Forster came to me about you —you know what she is. But I'm so vexed you should have heard all in a minute like, only you understand how it was, dear, don't you? And his wife has paid up the bills, all in cash, and wants to stay over Sunday."

"There's the bell," said Lydia.

"Then I must go, dear—you know how it is. That old Miss Lillicrap is such a terror with the vegetables. I do feel so vexed about it all—and your auntie will be upset, won't she? Are you ready, dear?"

Lydia saw that the kind woman was waiting to accompany her downstairs to the dining-room, but she had every intention of making her entrance unescorted.

"I'm not quite ready," she said coolly. "Please don't wait—I know you want to be downstairs."

The manageress looked bewildered, and as though she felt herself to have been rebuffed, but she spoke in her usual rather incoherently good-natured fashion as she hastened down the stairs.

"Just whatever you like, and it'll be quite all right.

I quite understand. I wish I could wait, dear, but really I daren't. . . ."

Lydia was very glad that Miss Nettleship dared not wait.

She herself remained upstairs for another full five minutes, although her remaining preparations were easily completed in one.

At the end of the five minutes she felt sure that all the boarders must be assembled. Hardly anyone was ever late for a meal, since meals for most of the women, at any rate, contributed the principal variety in the day's occupation.

Nevertheless, Lydia went downstairs very slowly, until the sound of clattering plates and dishes, broken by occasional outbreaks of conversation, told her that dinner was in progress.

Then she quickly opened the dining-room door.

They were all there, and they all looked up as she came in.

Her accustomed seat at the far end of the table, next to the Greek, was empty, but on Margoliouth's other side sat a strange woman, whom Lydia was at no pains to identify, even had Miss Forster's description not at once returned to her mind. "Very dark—and stout—and dressed like a foreigner."

Mrs. Margoliouth was all that.

Lydia saw the room and everyone in it, in a flash, as she closed the door behind her.

Miss Lillicrap, clutching her knife and fork, almost as though she were afraid that her food might be snatched from her plate while she peered across the room with eager, malevolent curiosity—Miss Nettleship, suddenly silent in the midst of some babbled triviality, and evidently undecided whether to get up

or to remain seated—Mrs. Bulteel, her sharp gaze fixed upon Lydia and her pinched mouth half open—Miss Forster, also staring undisguisedly—Mrs. Clarence, with her foolish, red-rimmed eyes almost starting from her head—the youth, Hector Bulteel, his mouth still half-full and a tumbler arrested in mid-career in his hand—his father's sallow face turned towards the door, wrinkled with an evident discomfiture.

Mrs. Margoliouth herself had raised a pair of black, hostile-looking eyes, set in a heavy, pasty face, to fix them upon Lydia.

Irene had stopped her shuffling progress round the table, and turned her head over her shoulder.

Only Margoliouth remained with his head bent over his plate, apparently absorbed in the food that he was sedulously cutting up into small pieces.

In the momentary silence Lydia advanced. Her heart was beating very quickly, but she was conscious of distinct exhilaration, and she remembered to tilt her chin a little upward and to walk slowly.

There was the sudden scraping of a chair, and pale, ugly Mr. Bulteel had sprung forward, and come down the room to meet her.

The unexpected little act of chivalry, which obviously came as a surprise to himself as to everybody else, nearly startled Lydia out of her predetermined composure.

She looked up at him and smiled rather tremulously, and he pulled out her chair for her, and waited until she was seated before returning to his own place again.

The meal went on, and the atmosphere was electric. Contrary to her custom, Miss Nettleship made no attempt at introducing the newcomer, and Margoliouth did not seek to rectify the omission.

He ate silently, his eyes on his plate. Twice Lydia addressed small, commonplace remarks to him, each time in the midst of a silence, wherein her voice sounded very clear and steady. He answered politely but briefly, and the other women at the table exchanged glances, and one or two of them looked admiringly at Lydia.

It was this consciousness that kept her outwardly composed, for she found the position far more of an ordeal than she had expected it to be. She was even aware that, under the table, a certain nervous trembling that she could not repress was causing her knees to knock together.

She felt very glad when the meal was over and old Miss Lillicrap—who always gave the signal for dispersal—had pushed her chair back, and said venomously:

"Well, I can't say, 'Thank you for my good dinner.' The fowl was tough, and I didn't get my fair share of sauce with the pudding."

"Are we having a rubber to-night?" Miss Forster inquired loudly of no one in particular, with the evident intention of silencing Miss Lillicrap.

Lydia saw Mrs. Bulteel frown and shake her head, as though in warning.

Margoliouth, however, had at last looked up.

"I'm not playing to-night," he said sullenly.

"Doesn't your wife play Bridge?" Miss Forster inquired rather maliciously.

"No."

"You're tired with your journey perhaps," piped Mrs. Clarence, looking inquisitively at the stranger.

Mrs. Margoliouth stared back at her with lack-lustre and rather contemptuous-looking black eyes.

"What journey?" she said in a thick voice. "I've only come up from Clapham, where we go back on Monday. Our house is at Clapham. The children are there."

"The children?" repeated Mrs. Clarence foolishly.

"We have five children," said Mrs. Margoliouth impassively, but she cast a fierce glance at her husband as she spoke.

Miss Forster suddenly thrust herself forward, and demonstratively put her arm round Lydia's waist.

"I suppose you're going upstairs to your scribbling, as usual, you naughty girl?" she inquired affectionately.

"I ought to," Lydia said, smiling faintly. "It isn't cold in my room now that I've got a little oil-stove. I got the idea from a girl I went to supper with the other night, who lives in rooms."

"How splendid!" said Miss Forster, with loud conviction, her tone and manner leaving no room for doubt that she was paying a tribute to something other than the inspiration of the oil-stove.

Lydia smiled again, and went upstairs.

The other boarders were going upstairs too, and as Lydia turned the corner of the higher flights that led to her own room, she could hear them on the landing below.

"I do think that girl's behaving most splendidly!"

Miss Forster's emphatic superlatives were unmistakable.

"She looks like a sort of queen to-night," said an awed voice, that Lydia recognized with surprise as belonging to the usually inarticulate Hector Bulteel.

She had not missed her effect, then.

Lydia did not write that evening. She went to bed

almost at once, glad of the darkness, and feeling strangely tired. After she was in bed she even found, to her own surprise, that she was shedding tears that she could not altogether check at will.

Then, after all, she *minded?*

Lydia could not analyze her own emotion, and as the strain of the day relaxed, she quietly cried herself to sleep like a child.

But the eventual analysis of the whole episode, made by Lydia with characteristic detachment, brought home to her various certainties.

Margoliouth's defection had hurt her vanity slightly —her heart not at all.

She could calmly look back upon her brief relations with him as experience, and therefore to be valued.

But perhaps the conviction that penetrated her mind most strongly, was that one which she faced with her most unflinching cynicism, although it would have vexed her to put it into words for any other human being. No grief or bereavement that her youth was yet able to conceive of could hurt her sufficiently to discount the lasting and fundamental satisfaction of the *beau rôle* that it would bestow upon her in the view of the onlookers.

XIII

"BROKEN heart? Nonsense. People with broken hearts don't eat chestnut-pudding like that," quoth Grandpapa.

Lydia would have preferred to make her own explanations at Regency Terrace, but Miss Nettleship had already written a long letter to Aunt Beryl, as Lydia discovered when she reached home on Christmas Eve.

Aunt Beryl took the affair very seriously, and made Lydia feel slightly ridiculous.

"Trifling like that with a young girl, and him a married man the whole of the time!" said Aunt Beryl indignantly.

"It's all *right*, auntie," Lydia made rather impatient answer. "I didn't take it seriously, you know."

"How did he know you weren't going to? Many a girl has had her heart broken for less."

It was then that Grandpapa uttered his unkind allusion to Lydia's undoubted appreciation of her favourite chestnut-pudding, made in honour of her arrival by Aunt Beryl herself.

Lydia knew very well that Grandpapa would have been still more disagreeable if she had pretended a complete loss of appetite, and she felt rather indignant that this very absence of affectation should thus come in for criticism.

Although she had only been away four months, the house seemed smaller, and the conversation of Aunt

Beryl and Uncle George more restricted. She was not disappointed when her aunt told her that their Christmas dinner was to be eaten at midday, and that there would be guests.

"Who do you think is here, actually staying at the 'Osborne'?" Miss Raymond inquired.

Lydia was unable to guess.

"Your Aunt Evelyn, with Olive. They've been worried about Olive for quite a time now—she can't throw off a cold she caught in the autumn, and, of course, there *have* been lungs in the Senthoven family, so they're a bit uneasy. Aunt Evelyn brought her down here for a change, and Bob's coming down for Christmas Day. They keep him very busy at the office now. Don't you ever run across him in town, Lydia?"

"No, never," said Lydia, with great decision.

She had no wish to meet Bob Senthoven in London, although she was rather curious to see both her cousins again.

She caught sight of him in church on Christmas morning, where she decorously sat between Aunt Beryl and Uncle George, in the seats that had been theirs ever since Lydia could remember.

Bob, who was on the outside, did not look as though he had altered very much. He was still short and stocky, with hair combed straight back and plastered close to his head.

Olive, much taller than her brother, was dressed in thick tweed, with a shirt and tie, and the only concession to her invalidhood that Lydia could see, was a large and rather mangy-looking yellow fur incongruously draped across her shoulders.

Mrs. Senthoven's smaller, slighter figure was completely hidden from view by her offspring.

As they all met outside the church door, Lydia, in thought, was instantly carried back to Wimbledon again, and her sixteenth year.

"Hullo, ole gurl!" from Olive.

"Same to you and many of 'em," briefly from Bob, in reply to anticipated Christmas greetings.

"We'll all walk back to the Terrace together, shall we?" suggested Aunt Beryl, on whose mind Lydia knew that elaborate preparations for dinner were weighing. "Grandpapa will want to wish you all a Merry Christmas, I'm sure."

Aunt Evelyn, not without reason, looked nervous, nor did Grandpapa's greeting serve to reassure her.

"Why does little Shamrock bark at you so, my dear?" he inquired of Olive, with a pointed look at her short skirts. "I'm afraid he doesn't like those great boots of yours."

It was quite evident that Grandpapa's opinion of the Senthoven family had undergone no modification.

They sat round the fire lit in the drawing-room in honour of the occasion, and Aunt Beryl hurried in and out, her face flushed from the kitchen fire, and hoped that they'd "all brought good appetites."

"There's the bell, Lydia! I wonder if you'd go down, dear? I can't spare the girl just now, and it's only Mr. Almond."

Lydia willingly opened the door to her old friend, and received his usual, rather precise greeting, together with an old-fashioned compliment on the roses that London had not succeeded in fading. She took him up to the drawing-room.

"Greetings of the season, ladies and gentlemen all," said Mr. Monteagle Almond, bowing in the doorway.

"Rum old buffer," said Bob to Lydia, aside.

She smiled rather coldly.

She felt sure that although the Bulteels and Miss Forster—who, after all, was the friend of Sir Rupert and Lady Honoret—might have accepted Mr. Almond and his out-of-date gentility, they would never have approved of Bob and Olive, with their witless, incessant slang.

"Now, then!" said Aunt Beryl, appearing in the doorway divested of her apron, and with freshly washed hands. "Dinner's quite ready, if the company is. George, will you lead the way with Eveyln?—Olive and Mr. Almond—that's right—now, Bob, you haven't forgotten the way to the dining-room—or, if you have, Lydia will show you—and I'll give Grandpapa an arm."

Aunt Beryl, for once, was excited and loquacious. Giving Grandpapa an arm, however, was a lengthy process, so that she missed the appreciative exclamations with which each couple duly honoured the festive appearance of the dining-room.

"How bright it looks!" cried Aunt Evelyn. "Now, doesn't it look bright?"

"Most seasonable, I declare," said Mr. Almond, rubbing his hands together.

"Oh, golly! crackers!"

"My eye, look at the mistletoe!" said Bob, and nudged Lydia with his elbow. Lydia immediately affected to ignore the huge bunches of mistletoe pendant in the window and over the table, and admired instead the holly decorating each place.

"A very curious old institution, mistletoe," said Uncle George, and seemed disappointed that nobody pursued the subject with a request for further information.

When they were all seated, and Grandpapa had leant heavily upon his corner of the table, and found a piece of holly beneath his hand, and vigorously flung it into the enormous fire blazing just behind his chair, Uncle George said again:

"Probably you all know the old song of the 'Mistletoe Bough,' but I wonder whether anyone can tell me the origin——"

"We'll come to the songs later on, my boy," said Grandpapa briskly. "Get on with the carving. Have you good appetites, young ladies?"

Olive only giggled, but Lydia smiled and nodded, and said, "Yes, Grandpapa, very good."

"You needn't nod your head like a mandarin at me. I can hear what you say very well," said Grandpapa, and Lydia became aware that she had instinctively been pandering to the Senthoven view that Grandpapa was a very old man indeed, with all the infirmities proper to his age.

The Christmas dinner was very well cooked, and very long and very hot, and conformed in every way to tradition.

"Don't forget the seasoning in the turkey, George," said Aunt Beryl agitatedly. "There's plenty more where that comes from. Give Lydia a little more seasoning—she likes chestnut. Sausage, Evelyn? Sausage, Mr. Almond? Bob, pass the sauce-boat to your sister, and don't forget to help yourself on the way. There's gravy and vegetables on the side."

Everyone ate a great deal, and the room grew hotter and hotter, so that the high colour on Olive Senthoven's face assumed a glazed aspect, and the fumes from the enormous dish in front of Uncle George rose visibly into the air.

Presently Gertrude brought the plum-pudding, blazing in a blue flame, and with a twig of holly sticking from the top, and much amusement was occasioned by the discovery that several of the slices contained a small silver emblem. Mr. Monteagle Almond solemnly disinterred a thimble, and Bob, with a scarlet face, a wedding-ring.

Under cover of Olive's screams on the discovery of a three-penny bit on her own plate, he pushed the ring over to Lydia.

"I shall give it to you," he muttered gruffly.

After the plum-pudding, they ate mince-pies, and a little spirit was poured over each and a lighted match applied by Uncle George, Mr. Almond or Bob, Aunt Beryl and Aunt Evelyn, in accordance with the usage of their day, each uttering a small scream as the flame shot up. When the mince-pies were all finished, the dessert dishes were pulled out from under the piled-up heaps of crackers and holly surmounting them.

The dessert was also traditional—oranges, nuts, apples, raisins, almonds. Everybody avoided direct mention of these last from a sense of delicacy, until Mr. Monteagle Almond himself remarked humorously:

"I think I will favour my namesake, if the ladies will pardon an act of cannibalism."

Upon which everybody laughed a great deal and jokes were made, and Bob and Olive began to ask riddles.

In the midst of Bob's best conundrum, Grandpapa suddenly knocked loudly upon the table.

"Send round the port, George," he ordered solemnly. "Round with the sun . . . that's right. The ladies must take a little wine, for the toasts."

Lydia knew what was coming. She had heard it

every year, and the transition from jovial animal enjoyment to sudden solemnity always gave her a slight thrill.

Grandpapa raised his glass, and everybody imitated the gesture.

"The Queen! God bless her."

The sentiment was devoutly echoed round the table.

Then Uncle George said in a very serious way:

"Our absent friends."

And the toast was drunk silently, Aunt Beryl raising her handkerchief to her eyes for a moment as she did every year, in whose honour nobody knew.

After that healths were proposed and honoured indiscriminately. Mr. Monteagle Almond ceremoniously toasted Aunt Beryl, and Bob, looking very sentimental, insisted upon knocking the rim of his glass several times against the rim of Lydia's. Uncle George, noncommittally confining himself to generalities, proposed "The Fair Sex," and Grandpapa effectually prevented anyone from rising to reply by sarcastically inquiring which of the ladies present would act as representative for them all.

The room grew steadily hotter.

Lydia had enjoyed the resumption of old festive customs and also the additional importance conferred upon herself as a two days' visitor from London, but she found herself viewing the familiar Christmas rituals from a new and more critical angle.

She was inclined to wonder how they would strike the aristocratic boarding-house in Bloomsbury, or even the fashionable "young ladies" at Madame Elena's.

Surely it was an out-of-date custom to join hot hand to hot hand all round the table, and sing, "Auld Lang

Syne" in voices made rather hoarse and throaty from food, and silently to pull each a cracker with either neighbour, hands crossed, and Uncle George saying, "One—two—three—all together, now—*Go!*"

Lydia felt mildly superior.

They adorned themselves with paper caps and crowns, Bob sheepishly self-conscious, Lydia critically so, and all the others merely serious. When no one could eat or drink anything more, Aunt Beryl said reluctantly:

"Well, then—shall we adjourn this meeting?" and they rose from the disordered table, now strewn with scraps of coloured paper from the crackers, dismembered twigs of holly, and innumerable crumbs.

"You gentlemen will be going for a walk, I suppose?" Aunt Evelyn suggested, as everyone hung about the hall indeterminately.

"That's right," said Grandpapa. "Get up an appetite for tea. And you'll take little Shamrock with you."

Little Shamrock, having been given no opportunity for over-eating himself, after the fashion of his betters, was careering round Uncle George's boots with a liveliness that boded ill for his docility during the expedition.

"We'll smoke a cigarette first, at all events," said Uncle George gloomily, and he and Mr. Almond and Bob went back into the dining-room again.

"You don't want to go for a walk, dear, do you?" said Aunt Beryl, and sighed with evident relief when Mrs. Senthoven shook her head in reply.

"Grandpapa?"

"The drawing-room is good enough for me," said Grandpapa, and Uncle George had to be called out of

the dining-room again to help him up the stairs and instal him in his arm-chair by the window.

"I say, aren't you girls coming with us?" demanded Bob rather disconsolately, leaning against the open door of the dining-room with a half-smoked cigar in his mouth.

"You'll go too far for us," said Lydia primly.

"Let you and me go off somewhere on our own," struck in Olive. "I'm game for a toddle, if you are but we don't want the men, do we?"

"You want to talk secrets—*I* know you," jeered Bob.

Lydia lifted her chin fastidiously and turned away.

Her cousins had not improved, she thought, and she was very angry when her dignified gesture inadvertently placed her beneath a beautiful bunch of mistletoe, hung in the hall by Aunt Beryl.

"Fair cop!" yelled Bob, and put his arm round her waist and gave her a sounding kiss.

She would not struggle, but she could not force herself to laugh, and she ran upstairs with a blazing face.

It was not that Lydia had any objection to being kissed, but that the publicity, and the scuffling, and the accompanying laughter offended her taste.

She felt almost as though she could have burst into angry tears.

"Are you two girls really going out?" Aunt Beryl inquired. "If so, I'll give you the key, Lydia. I'm letting the girl go home for the rest of the day, as soon as she's cleared up. The char's coming in to give her a hand with the washing-up."

"That's a *good* girl you've got hold of," Aunt Evelyn said emphatically. "She's been with you quite a time now, hasn't she?"

Aunt Beryl and Aunt Evelyn went upstairs, talking busily about the difficulty of training a servant really well, and then inducing her to remain with one. Presently, Lydia knew, they would go into Aunt Beryl's room, under pretext of looking at a paper pattern, or a new blouse bought at a clearance sale, and they would lie down on Aunt Beryl's bed, with eiderdowns and a couple of cloaks to keep them warm, and doze until tea-time.

Lydia herself felt heavy and drowsy, but nothing would have induced her to lie down upon her bed with Olive beside her. Instead, she put on her best hat and jacket, and a pair of high-heeled, patent-leather walking shoes, and took her cousin out into the mild damp of the December afternoon.

"What I call a muggy day," said Olive.

"Shall we go along the Front?" Lydia inquired.

"It's all those shoes of yours are good for, I should think," retorted Olive candidly. "Still the same old juggins about your clothes, I see?"

The Front—a strip of esplanade with the shingle and the grey sea on one side, beneath a low stone wall, and the green of the Public Gardens on the other—was almost deserted.

One or two young men in bowler hats and smoking Woodbine cigarettes hung round the empty band-stand, and an occasional invalid was pushed or pulled along in a bath-chair. Here and there a pair of sweethearts sat together in one of the small green shelters—the girl leaning against the man, and both of them motionless and speechless.

The sight of one such couple apparently gave Olive a desired opening.

"I say, what's all this about you falling in love with some chappie in London?" she demanded abruptly.

"I haven't fallen in love with anybody, that I know of," said Lydia coolly.

"But there was someone going after you, now, wasn't there?" urged Olive.

Lydia reflected.

"Who told you anything about it?" she demanded at last.

"Aunt Beryl told the mater."

Lydia perceived to her surprise that Olive did not, as she would have expected her to do, despise her cousin for "sloppiness." On the contrary, she appeared to be really impressed, and anxious to hear details from the heroine of the affair. Lydia did not resist the temptation.

She gave Olive a brief and poignant version of the tragedy.

There *had* been a man—a fellow-boarder at the great boarding-house in Bloomsbury that was always full of people, men and women alike. He was a foreigner —a distinguished sort of man—who had certainly paid Lydia a great deal of attention. Everyone had noticed it. Theatres, hansom-cabs, chocolates—he had appeared to think nothing too good for her. Certain of these attentions Lydia had accepted.

"Well, whyever not!" ejaculated Olive.

She worked hard all the week, and it was pleasant to have a little relaxation, and, besides, the Greek gentleman was most cultivated and clever—one had really interesting conversations with him about books. But——

Lydia paused impressively, really uncertain of what she was about to say. She was very seldom anything

but truthful, and could not remember ever having told a direct lie since she was a little girl. Nevertheless, she did not want Olive to suppose her a mere dupe, the more especially as she felt perfectly certain that whatever she told Olive would be repeated to Olive's family, as nearly as possible word for word.

Lydia, therefore, said nothing untrue, but she rather subtly contrived to convey a desirable impression that, without any direct statements, should yet penetrate to Olive's consciousness. There had certainly been a mystery about the Greek. He was very uncommunicative about himself—even to Lydia herself. Then one day, after he had taken her out and been more attentive than ever, they had come in to find a foreign woman there who called herself his wife.

"Why, it's like a novel!" gasped Olive. "There's a plot exactly like that in a story called 'Neither Wife nor Maid.' Only the fellow turns out to be all right in the end, and the girl marries him."

"I should never have married Mr. Margoliouth," said Lydia haughtily.

"But of course he'd no right to carry on like that if he was married all the time," said Olive. "Men are rotters!"

Lydia gazed at her cousin thoughtfully.

"That woman *said* she was his wife," she remarked quietly.

"I say! d'you think it was all my eye and Betty Martin?"

"I don't know. But it was an awkward sort of position for him."

"Lord, yes!" said Olive more emphatically than ever, and Lydia felt that any humiliation attaching to the *débâcle* had been effectually transferred, so far as

Olive's interpretation of it was concerned, from herself to the Greek deceiver.

"Of course, it doesn't matter to you, Lyd—a good-looking gurl like you," said Olive simply.

Lydia felt that after this she could well afford to change the conversation.

She made inquiries about Beatrice.

"Oh, just rotting about," said Olive discontentedly. "I wish she and I could do something for ourselves, the way you do, but the old birds wouldn't hear of it. Besides, I don't know what we could do, either of us. Bee plays hockey whenever she gets the chance, of course, and goes to all the hops. She's taken up dancing like anything."

"And haven't you?"

"Can't," said Olive briefly. "They're scared of me going off like the pater's sister. Chest, you know. But Beatrice is as strong as a horse. You know she's sort of engaged?"

"Who to?"

"The eldest Swaine boy—you remember Stanley Swaine? Nobody's a bit pleased about it, because they can't ever get married, possibly."

"No money?"

"Not a penny, and he's a perfect fool, except at games. He got the sack from the Bank, and now he hasn't any job at all. Bob says he drinks, but I daresay that's a lie."

"And does Beatrice like him?" said Lydia, rather astonished.

"Perfectly dotty about him. He's always hanging round—*I* think the pater ought to forbid him the house. But instead of that he comes in after supper of an evening, and he and Bee sit in the dining-room in

the dark, and she comes up after he's cleared off with her face like fire and her hair half down her back. Absolutely disgusting, I call it."

Lydia was very much inclined inwardly to endorse this trenchant criticism.

She had never been so much aware of her own fastidiousness as she was now, on her return from the new surroundings which seemed to her so infinitely superior to the old. Really, it was terrible to think of how clever, fashionably-dressed Miss Forster, or haughty and disagreeable Miss Lillicrap, would have looked upon Olive Senthoven and her slangy, vulgar confidences.

As for the young ladies at Elena's, they would probably have refused to believe that anything so unrefined could be related to Lydia Raymond at all.

Nevertheless, Lydia Raymond expressed interest and even sympathy in all that Olive told her, and was conscious of feeling both pleased and flattered when, as they entered Regency Terrace again, Olive remarked with what, by the Senthoven standards, perilously approached to sentiment:

"I must say, ole gurl, I never thought you'd turn out such a decent sort."

They found Aunt Beryl, whose nap must after all have been a very short one, preparing a magnificent muffin-and-crumpet tea in the kitchen.

"Auntie! let me help you," Lydia cried.

"No, no. You go and take off your things."

Lydia pulled off her hat and jacket and laid them on the kitchen dresser.

"Are we using the blue tea-service to-day?" she asked calmly.

"But you're on a holiday, dearie! Don't you worry

about the tea—I'll manage it. It's only to get the table laid in the drawing-room."

Lydia, however, carried her point. It would have made her feel thoroughly uncomfortable to see Aunt Beryl toiling upstairs with the heavy trays, and it would have looked, besides, as though she, Lydia, had grown to think herself too "fine" for household work.

So she carried the best blue china upstairs and set it out on the embroidered tea-cloth, and Aunt Evelyn, who was sitting with Grandpapa, looked at her approvingly and called her a good girl.

After tea she received other compliments.

They asked about her work in London, and Lydia told them about the great ledgers, and the bills and the invoices, and of how Madame Elena had practically said that she should leave Lydia in charge of the other girls, when she went to Paris to buy new models for Easter.

She also told them about the other young ladies, of Gina Ryott's good looks, and the cleverness and independence of little Rosie Graham, who lived in such nice rooms with a girl friend.

"And do they make you comfortable at the boarding-house?" Aunt Evelyn asked solicitously.

"Yes, very comfortable—and there were such nice superior people there. There was a Miss Forster, who played Bridge splendidly, and was great friends with a Sir Rupert and Lady Honoret, who lived in Lexham Gardens."

"Fancy!" Aunt Evelyn ejaculated. "I've seen Lady Honoret's name in print, too, I'm almost certain."

And the Bulteels were a nice family, Lydia said, with a clever son who went to Gower Street University.

"A great many clever folk in the world," said Mr. Monteagle Almond sententiously. "And no doubt you'll meet many of them in London. But I think, if you'll excuse personalities, that you'll find it's as I say —the true mathematical mind is a very rare thing in one of your sex."

Lydia's relations looked at her admiringly.

Only Grandpapa, with a detached expression, occupied himself in making a great fuss about Shamrock.

That night, when Lydia said good night to him, the old man fixed his eyes upon her with his most impish-looking twinkle.

"Why didn't you tell them about your romance, eh, Lyddie? The broken heart, and all the rest of it. You could have made a very pretty story out of it, I'm sure. You only told one-half of the tale when you were entertaining us all so grandly this evening. Always remember, me dear, whether you're listening to a tale or telling one: Every penny piece that's struck has two sides to it."

XIV

LYDIA had to go back to London by an afternoon train on Boxing Day.

Aunt Beryl packed her small hand-bag for her and gave her a large packet of cake and chocolate for the journey, and said, with all the increase of affectionate anxiety that she had displayed since learning of the Margoliouth catastrophe:

"Good-bye, dearie, and bless you. I haven't packed those new fur gloves, because I thought you'd want to wear them up. Mind you don't get cold, now. It's been lovely, having you."

Grandpapa said good-bye to Lydia in his most condescending manner, and told her that next time she would honour them with a visit a second chestnut-pudding should certainly be forthcoming.

"For I notice, Lyddie, that a broken heart doesn't impair the appetite."

"Good-bye, Grandpapa," said Lydia austerely. It vexed her that the old man, with whom she had always had so good an understanding, should treat her now, as he did everyone else, with mockery.

No doubt he had not forgiven her for going to London.

She was escorted to the station by Uncle George and Shamrock.

"Do you find things pan out all right, as regards the root of all evil?" Uncle George suddenly made inquiry, after they had whistled and called for a long time, in a

vain endeavour to dissuade Shamrock from chasing a strange cat.

"Oh!" said Lydia, surprised. "Yes, really I do. Of course I haven't saved quite as much as I hoped I should, but now I know my way about rather better I hope it'll be easier."

"Ah, I daresay," said Uncle George absently.

"I should like to be able to refund you and Aunt Beryl some of all the money I've cost you."

"Why? What nonsense! Here, Shamrock—come out of that, sir. No, no, child—don't feel yourself under any obligation to us. Look here, Lydia, that infernal dog will make us miss the train—how goes the enemy?"

"Quarter of an hour more."

"Then we shall do it easy. Tell me," said Uncle George, with an abruptness that argued a strong desire to give a fresh trend to the conversation, "what do you suppose the road's up, just here, for—and on a holiday, too?"

"Repairs, I suppose," said Lydia easily, well aware that whatever she supposed Uncle George had every intention of enlightening her still more completely.

"Road repairs? No, no. Now there's a hydrant just on the other side of the street——"

Uncle George talked on in the old Mr. Barlow strain, and Lydia listened attentively enough to put in a few intelligent questions.

When they reached the station they had lost Shamrock altogether, but the train was not yet in.

"Not very crowded," said Uncle George, scanning the platform. "Quite right not to go by the last train, Lydia."

He bought her ticket, ignoring the little purse she

hastily tendered, and when he had finally put her into a third-class carriage, well in the middle of the train because that was the safest place in the event of an accident, Uncle George leant in through the open window and pushed a gold piece into his niece's palm.

"You can settle any little outstanding Sweet William with that, in case you've been buying fal-lals," he whispered, and drew back hastily just as the train began to move.

They *were* kind!

Lydia felt quite ashamed, because she was distinctly conscious of relief at going back into the broader, bigger life that she felt sure London held for her.

She had no reluctance even in returning to the shop. The break had not been long enough to make her appreciate the luxury of idleness, and she was, besides, genuinely interested in her work and anxious for her own advancement. She knew that the Principal liked her and approved of her steady-going enthusiasm, and she was now easily first in popularity with the other girls. Something of her affair with the Greek had penetrated to the show-room at Elena's, and she found herself more or less exalted into the position of a wronged heroine.

Lydia did not make the mistake of taxing the tentative sympathy offered her by a recital of her story. She remained subtly aloof, grateful for the kindness shown her and indefinably plaintive.

The girls discussed her among themselves, and Lydia, not without satisfaction, knew it.

At the boarding-house she met with a more outspoken championship.

The Bulteels invited her to the theatre one night, "to cheer her up," and foolish, little, pink-eyed Mrs.

Clarence, on the evening of Lydia's return, nearly set the house on fire in an endeavour to have the little oil-stove in Number Seventeen all ready lit for her reception.

Miss Nettleship kissed Lydia when she welcomed her back again, and gave her a copy of *Bibby's Annual,* saying affectionately: "I thought you'd like a book better than anything, dear—you quite understand, don't you?"

But the most astounding consolation of all was proffered to Lydia by Miss Forster, a week after her return.

"I've been talking about you this afternoon," she suddenly informed Lydia in a very arch tone one evening.

"I hope you didn't say anything very bad?"

"Quite the reverse, my dear girl, I can assure you. Haven't your ears been burning?"

Both Miss Forster's hands flew to her rather large ears, hung with dangling blue drops.

"I was telling Lady Honoret about you, and your writing and all. So much interested she was, and she suggested that I should take you to see her in Lexham Gardens one day when they're back from the country. They've just gone down to their place in Surrey for a week or two, you know. But you'd like to come and see her in Lexham Gardens one day, wouldn't you?"

Miss Forster spoke so triumphantly that the words hardly had the form of a question at all, but sounded more like a blatantly triumphant announcement of some glorious certainty. Indeed, the moment was in the nature of an apotheosis.

To see Miss Forster's cherished and distinguished friend, Lady Honoret, whom all the boarders had so

frequently heard quoted, and that at her own invitation, was sufficient to constitute an epoch.

Lydia felt it to be so. Who knew what such an introduction might lead to?

"Thank you very much," she said. "I should like to come with you very much. It's very kind of Lady Honoret."

"Oh, she's such a very kind-hearted creature. And then you know she's tremendously interested in anyone who writes—of course, she's literary herself, as you know."

An imaginary pen flew with rapidity across space.

"I told her about your stories—not that you've let me see any of them, naughty girl—and what a plain little thing you are."

Miss Forster laughed so heartily that no one could possibly remain in doubt as to her flattering intention in employing an adjective so obviously unsuited to her newly-adopted protégée.

The first effect of the prospect thus opened to her was to give fresh impetus to Lydia's literary activities.

If one were presented to Lady Honoret as a struggling young writer, it would be necessary to give some proof of one's gifts. Besides, Lydia really felt the impulse to write strong within her, and she was anxious to justify the ambition of which so many people, thanks to Margoliouth's indiscretion, now knew.

She began to write a novel.

Her old experience with the Children's Competition came back to her, and she had the wit to confine herself to those subjects only of which she had personal knowledge. After all, it was very easy.

The heroine developed into a slightly idealized Lydia, and the culminating episode of the very slender little

story was her sudden disillusionment at the hands of a coarsened and exaggerated Margoliouth.

The event was just the one that had really happened, looked at from another and more tender point of view, and a certain gift for simplicity of expression, together with a sense of proportion that saved the tiny tragedy from any quality of absurdity, gave the effect of a curiously genuine pathos.

Lydia wrote every evening in her room, and found it astonishingly easy. She was afraid that the book would not be long enough, but did not know how to estimate its length. There were twenty chapters altogether, but she thought that they were rather short.

She laid the scene at Wimbledon, certain aspects of which she remembered perfectly well, and introduced a humorous family that faintly caricatured the Swaine establishment.

Having no acquaintance with anything masculine that seemed to her a suitable type for a hero of fiction, Lydia wisely eliminated this *beau rôle* from the scene altogether, and the story ended on a piteous little note of loneliness and bewilderment. She finished it in two months, re-read it and made hardly any alterations at all, and then sent the original manuscript to Nathalie Palmer, who owned and used a typewriter.

"Oh, Lydia!" wrote back Nathalie, just as enthusiastic as though she and Lydia had only parted the day before, "your story is lovely. I cried over the end of it—I couldn't help it. You *are* clever! Of course I'll type it; really, I look upon it as an honour, and I'm sure any publisher would be only too thankful to have such a book sent to him. All the people are so real, and you've written it all so beautifully. . . ."

Nathalie's hyperbole went on for nearly three pages,

and Lydia, though she smiled a little, could not help feeling pleased. If Lady Honoret was really interested in literary attempts, as Miss Forster had said, then she should see the typescript, and perhaps be of real assistance in getting it placed in the hands of a good publisher.

Meanwhile influenza detained Lady Honoret in the country, as Lydia learnt from the loud lamentations of Miss Forster, and it was nearly the middle of April before the great occasion actually materialized.

"Lady Honoret has asked me to take you to tea at Lexham Gardens on Saturday next," Miss Forster announced. "She quite understands about Saturday being your only afternoon, and there's to be no party—perhaps just a quiet game of Bridge, but she won't expect you to play."

This was as well, Lydia reflected, not without humour. She had learnt to play whist under the careful tuition of Uncle George, but the modern game was quite unknown to her, and she had vague recollections of having read in some of Aunt Evelyn's fashion papers terrible warnings to girls, to the effect that it was possible for guileless beginners to lose two or three hundred pounds at a single game.

The instinct that always forbade her to acknowledge unnecessarily any ignorance or inability in herself, however, kept her silent on the subject of Bridge, and she only smiled intelligently her appreciation of Lady Honoret's thoughtfulness.

"Wear your cerise, dear, with that navy blue costume, won't you?" counselled Miss Forster solicitously.

The deep-red silk blouse was Lydia's own favourite, and three days before she was to go to Lexham Gardens she paid a visit to the millinery room at Elena's.

The two pale and exclusive young ladies there were always delighted to see her.

"I wanted to look at the new models, if you'll let me," Lydia confided to them. "You see I want to make a rather special hat for myself for a tea-party I'm going to, and I thought I might get some ideas here."

They were effusively sympathetic.

"Of course, dear—what about this *tricorne?* It's absolutely new in, and that Lady St. Ogg who was in this morning—you know, dear, the Countess—she as nearly as possible bought it for Lady Moira Pring. They got that flame-coloured toque in the end, but they were awfully taken with this one—said black velours was always so distinguished. It'll be gone to-morrow, I'm certain."

"It's lovely," said Lydia, "and I know it would suit me—I love that shape."

"Slip it on, dear," said the senior assistant. "There'll be no one in here just now, and, anyway, we should hear the bell. Ivy here can keep an eye on the entrance."

Lydia carefully put on the little black velvet hat—a plain three-cornered shape, with a tiny edging of gold braid gathered into a small gold cockade laid against the severe line above the left profile.

"Oh, it's heavenly!" she breathed, sincerely ecstatic. "But I couldn't ever copy anything like that—I should have to get a shape."

The millinery young ladies exchanged glances.

"Look here, dear, I don't see why we shouldn't do it for you. Oh, it'll take no time at all—you'll just want to get the velvet, and the braid, and some wire. Only don't you ever let on to a soul—or wear the hat when

old Peroxide is within a hundred miles. It'll be all right in a month or two—that shape will be as common as dirt—but she'd spot it in a second if you came out with it now."

Lydia, enraptured, felt herself repaid over and over again for the studied courtesy which she had always been so careful to employ towards the two millinery girls.

They disclaimed her thanks, and promised that the hat should be forthcoming on Saturday morning.

"And mark my words, dear—it'll pay you over and over again, if you've got the cash to get really *good* velours. You know, the real stuff, not cheap imitation that spots the first time you put it on."

Lydia took the advice, and though the materials cost her more money than she had meant to spend, the hat on Saturday morning was almost indistinguishable from the model.

Lydia felt that its beauty would obscure the plainness of her dark coat and skirt and distract attention from her complete absence of jewellery.

Like most girls of the class to which she belonged, Lydia concentrated rather upon her dress than upon accessories which she regarded as minor ones. Consequently, although her black stockings were of vegetable silk, her buckled shoes were down at heel, and showed cracks across their patent leather tips, and her dark gloves were very much worn at the finger ends, and no longer looked clean, although she had only worn them on Sundays, she experienced a slight feeling of mortification at the sight of Miss Forster's very tight white-kid gloves, and elaborate fur muff and stole; but, after all, the day was much too mild for furs, and

Lydia felt certain that Miss Forster had only put them on because they were becoming.

Miss Forster looked very sharply indeed at Lydia's hat, but she said nothing about it, and somehow this unusual reticence seemed to imply an almost unwilling amount of astonished admiration.

Lydia felt subtly flattered.

"Now there's nothing to be nervous of," Miss Forster said kindly, as the omnibus jolted them along the Cromwell Road. "Lady H. is every bit as simple as you or me, and she's so keen to see you. I told her all about your writing, and one of her great specialties is to discover new talent, you know. She's always on the look-out for it."

They got out at the corner of Lexham Gardens at last, and Miss Forster hurried along with short, quick steps.

"Have you ever been in one of these big Kensington houses before? Lovely, they are, and so roomy. Lady Honoret always says she feels right *out* of town here —but Sir Rupert likes it."

Lydia was inclined to agree with Sir Rupert.

The flight of stone steps in front of the house led up to a door that was painted a bright, glaring blue; there was a brass knocker shaped like a lion's head, and yellow flowers blazed from the window boxes on the first and second floors.

A manservant opened the door, and they were ushered into the drawing-room, which was on the left of the entrance-hall.

"Miss Forster!"

She had only given her own name, rather to Lydia's vexation.

The hostess, who rustled forward in an elaborate tea-

gown, upset Lydia's preconceived ideas of the literary Lady Honoret altogether.

She was small and slight, with a fuzz of curly dark hair arranged in a heavy fringe on her forehead; her nose was wide and *retroussé,* and her small white teeth rather prominent. Her neck was slung with a pearl necklace, and with various chains from which dangled two or three lockets and charms, and she wore a number of glittering rings on her small, gesticulating white hands.

When she greeted Miss Forster, Lydia was rather surprised that they did not kiss one another, but only shook hands.

"And is this the little writer?" Lady Honoret exclaimed, in a high voice that held some indefinable suggestion of a lisp. "I'm so ve'y glad to see you, and we must have a long, long talk about your work. Perhaps I can be of use to you—I write myself."

"Oh, yes, I know," said Lydia boldly.

Lady Honoret smiled and nodded, as though taking it for granted that of course everyone knew she wrote, and introduced to Lydia an elderly gentleman in a grey frock-coat, with whom Miss Forster had already vigorously shaken hands.

Lydia observed that he withdrew his fingers from that hearty clasp with an expression that almost amounted to a wince, and that he only acknowledged her own presence by a bow so deep that it revealed the baldness on the top of his dark head. She inclined to think, however, that he was only middle-aged, in spite of the baldness, and of a certain width of outline at the waist of his beautiful coat.

"Mr. Cassela."

"You must be careful what you say to Mr. Cassela," Lady Honoret said, laughing.

"Dear lady!" Mr. Cassela protested in a voice quite as high as, and a good deal more affected than, that of his hostess.

"Miss Raymond writes. I'm not sure that you're not the first publisher to have the honour of her acquaintance. Ah, tea! and I behold toast! Don't you *adore* buttered toast?"

"I adore it indeed," said the publisher gravely; "but nothing—nothing, to my mind, can equal the love of my childhood—the wonderful Sally Lunn. Ah, dear lady, you are too young to look back with that passion of voluptuous regret that one bestows upon the vanished gastronomic delights of infancy! I have the most rapturous recollections of a Sally Lunn making its periodic appearance upon the nursery tea-table of my youth—and yet I fear—I terribly fear—that a Sally Lunn to-day would leave me cold—quite cold."

"May you never meet one," breathed Lady Honoret. "It might be too, too sad and disillusioning. You must live on the beautiful memory of the past. *I* once had a passion for green bull's-eyes. I remember it perfectly."

"But surely—surely," said the publisher anxiously, "that can still live—crystallized and matured, as it were, into the most transcendental expression of which the bull's-eye is capable—*crème de menthe.*"

He raised his white, rather puffy hands as he spoke, in a gesture of almost sacramental solemnity.

"I adore *crème de menthe,* for its lovely, lovely eme'ald colour," said Lady Honoret. "Green is a sacred colour—and quite my favourite in the world."

"The sacred colour of vernal youth," replied the

publisher. "Now a deep rich purple is to *me* the sacred colour—that purple that holds all passion in the heart of it. The child, of course"—he suddenly waved a hand at Lydia—"the palest blush rose—or even pure white? Yes, I think it can still claim white—the white of a white violet, *bien entendu*—not the heavy, sensual white of the magnolia."

"And you?"

He abruptly turned to Miss Forster.

"My colour? Oh, blue—blue—blue. Certainly, blue."

It was as though, by her breezy repetitions, Miss Forster strove to disguise her lack of the picturesque hyperbole of which the other two were making use in their strange conversation.

Lydia listened to them with complete bewilderment, and a gradual, invading sensation of contempt. Talk like this was *silly*, and they seemed to be as much in earnest as though the fate of an empire were being discussed.

"Blue is *so* mystical," Lady Honoret observed. "I'm told that I'm a mystic. And yet it's a ve'y, ve'y ext'ordinary thing, I never wear blue. It seems to me so cold. I shrink from it, in some ext'aordinary way. It devitalizes me. I suppose I have a dual personality."

"Never, never tamper with vitality," begged Mr. Cassela. "Vitality is my religion—my only creed."

He turned towards Lydia.

"You, who are young and wonderful," he said matter-of-factly, "I do pray and trust that you are an ardent disciple of vitality? It is what we need so terribly just now."

Never before had Lydia conceived of a conversation wherein personalities of the kind just addressed to her

should be admitted. But these people were not mad, although Aunt Beryl would undoubtedly have thought them so, and even although Miss Forster wore an air of being brightly determined not to think them so.

They were, on the contrary, people who counted for something in a world that was totally unknown to Lydia, and towards which she aspired.

Miss Forster was gazing at her rather anxiously, as though doubtful whether she would be able to answer Mr. Cassela suitably, and a sudden impish inspiration seized upon Lydia.

"I *adore* vitality," she said, as nearly as possible in Lady Honoret's own manner.

She was astonished at herself when she had said it, but Mr. Cassela appeared merely to be deeply gratified.

"Then I have indeed found another kindred spirit, dear lady!" said he. And he added calmly to Lady Honoret: "Is this your discovery? But how young! how exquisitely, adorably young!"

Lydia could hardly believe that he was referring to her, and was relieved when her hostess, for once disregarding the element of personality in the conversation, answered in a vague manner:

"Discoveries are so wonderful, aren't they? You know it was I who *really* discovered that marvellous, marvellous c'eature, the plumber who published a book of verses last year—the author of the 'Lyrics addressed to the Inanimate'?"

"Ah, yes, yes! I congratulate you indeed. But let me tell you a secret, dear lady. I have a discovery of my own—a novel that will appear this autumn—a colossal production! And by whom do you think?"

Lydia thought that Lady Honoret looked annoyed, but she nevertheless gazed inquiringly at Mr. Cassela.

"By a fifteen-year-old school-girl!" he hissed.

There was a death-like silence.

Lydia wanted to laugh, partly from the sheer sense of anti-climax, and partly from nervousness.

"The vitality, the grip, the passion, that child has put into her work! It's incredible—it defies description. Wait—wait and see the storm that book will raise. I'm going to advertise it everywhere—*with* the girl's portrait. A wild-looking creature, with an underhung jaw and sunken eyes—there's Red Indian blood in her. And I found her behind a bar in Liverpool—in *Liverpool!*"

His voice rose with horror.

"The author of 'Lyrics to the Inanimate' was starving when I met him," returned Lady Honoret sombrely—"starving in a London gutter."

"Quite romantic," Miss Forster suddenly and loudly declared, as though she felt that she had been left out of the conversation long enough.

Lydia heard the interruption with a shock at its inappositeness, so thoroughly had she already assimilated the atmosphere of her new surroundings. She felt positively relieved when the door opened at the same moment, and other visitors were announced.

This time Lydia was not made known to any of them, and she watched with curiosity Lady Honoret dropping the intensity of her manner and resuming the light, tinkling cordiality with which she herself had been greeted.

Miss Forster also appeared to be relieved, and began to talk eagerly about such topics as a sale taking place

at one of the big shops in Kensington High Street, and the prospect of warm weather at last.

Lydia finished the cold dregs of tea in her cup—which her hostess had not offered to replenish—and reflected that any of Aunt Beryl's or Aunt Evelyn's friends would have considered it very poor hospitality to allow a guest to remain sitting so long before an empty plate. She had not summoned enough courage to help herself from the nearest dish of thin bread-and-butter before there was a general movement, and she saw that a card-table had been prepared.

The two ladies whom Lydia did not know were already arranging themselves above the little baize-covered tables, their jewelled fingers and hooked noses hovering over the packs of cards.

"Miss Forster—Mr. Cassela? *Do* smoke—there are ciga'ettes on the table. . . ."

"But aren't you playing, dear Lady Honoret?" Miss Forster said solicitously, at the same time fingering her silver-net purse eagerly.

"Not this time," said the hostess, and laid her hand with an engaging smile on Lydia's arm. "I'm going to have a lovely, heart-to-heart talk with my new discove'y."

XV

LADY HONORET'S new discovery had sufficient shrewdness to find out for herself in a very little while the origin of that lady's rapidly-acquired enthusiasm.

Mr. Cassela's talk of the fifteen-year-old novelist who was to astonish the reading public that autumn, in the sequel glaringly illuminated the aspect of her own immediate success with Lady Honoret for Lydia.

It was evidently essential that a counter-discovery should mitigate the publisher's complacency, and sustain Lady Honoret's reputation as a *connaisseuse* in the literary world.

Even although the explanation did not flatter Lydia's vanity, it did not prevent her from appraising very justly and acutely the full value to herself of the little Jewess's patronage. She did not regret, in spite of Lady Honoret's lamentations, that she had not taken the manuscript of her novel to Lexham Gardens that first Saturday afternoon, since she received an immediate invitation to bring it with her one afternoon the following week.

"But I only have Saturday afternoons free," Lydia said serenely. "I work as accountant in a West End place of business all the week."

She could not have imagined beforehand that she would ever make such an announcement during the course of an afternoon call upon Lady Honoret, but the mention of starving plumbers and Liverpool bar-

maids had convinced her that such candour would prove merely an additional asset in her favour.

She was not in the least surprised when Lady Honoret said reverently:

"In a shop! Oh, how wonderful! And you find you can write? But I needn't ask. It *must* find exp'ession somehow, mustn't it—and one so often has to rise above uncongenial surroundings—unsympathetic atmosphere. . . . I myself . . . Sir Rupert, you know—cares *nothing* for literature, or indeed any of the artistic side of life, and so . . . and so I play B'idge," said Lady Honoret, her mouth and eyebrows assuming angles expressive of pathos, and her small hands making a fluttering gesture of vague resignation, that embraced alike the Bridge table and the drawing-room crowded with expensive furniture.

It was a little difficult to explain to Miss Forster that Lady Honoret had actually invited Lydia by herself to lunch on Sunday week, when she was to bring the typescript of her book; but Lydia did it with all the tact that she was able to command on their way home.

"I *wish* you were coming too," she said, not altogether truthfully. "I shall feel nervous without you, and of course you know them both so well."

"Oh, very well indeed," said Miss Forster with emphasis. "In fact, it's what I may call an intimate friendship—I am in and out almost as though it were my own home. Sir Rupert—you don't know him, of course—and I are tremendous pals—he always says: Now run in and out quite freely, at any hour."

As Miss Forster illustrated Sir Rupert's hospitable dictum with half a dozen hasty little steps, indicative of one running in and out quite freely, Lydia allowed her to join the omnibus that was to take them up Crom-

well Road, and herself followed sedately, so that the interior, always favoured by Miss Forster's large feathered hats, was filled when she came up, and she was obliged to exchange nods and waves with Miss Forster from the footboard and go outside, whence the conversation could naturally not be resumed.

During the week she brought Miss Forster a bunch of violets, and took pains not to appear as though she were avoiding her.

But when Sunday came, Lydia, decked in the three-cornered velvet hat, stole discreetly down the stairs and out of the front door at a moment when she knew that Miss Forster was in her own room.

She had no wish to make a parade of her success, and thereby risk exciting Miss Forster's vexation or jealousy. Nothing was more inconvenient than such an enmity, as Lydia had long ago told herself, thinking of the "sides" taken at school by Miss Glover's girls, or the quarrels between Gina Ryott and Marguerite Saxon at the shop, that had led to so many minor disputes and discussions.

She carried her novel in a brown-paper parcel.

Lady Honoret had assured Lydia that she would be quite, quite alone, and although at the moment Lydia had felt slightly disappointed by the announcement, it now saved her from nervousness.

"Miss Raymond!"

She had never heard her own entry into a room so announced before, and the novelty of the experience was occupying her mind as she came round the screen that guarded the drawing-room door.

With a complete shock, she discovered that quite a number of people were assembled there, dressed in such

clothes as she had hitherto only associated with a few of Madame Elena's most cherished clients.

Lady Honoret herself looked thoroughly unfamiliar as she came towards Lydia in a large, flowery picture-hat and fluffy feather boa, manipulating a long-handled double eye-glass, which she had certainly not used during Lydia's former visit. The unfortunate Lydia even surmised, from a certain vagueness of greeting, that her hostess had completely forgotten her identity.

"You told me to come—to bring my writing," she stammered courageously enough. "I hope it's the right day."

"Oh," said Lady Honoret, on a high, lisping note of pleased surprise, "it's my wonderful little seamstress, who writes! Of course! I'm so glad you've come, dear—of course I hadn't forgotten you."

Little seamstress who writes!

Was this the description that Lady Honoret had by this time probably persuaded herself and her friends to be applicable to her "wonderful new discove'y"?

Lydia tried to make herself think that the term, by Lady Honoret's peculiar standard of values, denoted a compliment. Nevertheless, she was inwardly both angry and mortified.

The long, elaborate luncheon was an ordeal that reminded her of that puzzling meal taken long ago at the hotel with Nathalie Palmer and her father. It was almost a relief, even while it humiliated her, that neither of her neighbours should address more than a few perfunctory words to her.

For the most part the conversation was general, several people all talking at once across the table—which Lydia had always been taught was Bad Manners

—and most of the ladies interlarding their discourse with French words, or even whole sentences in French.

It annoyed Lydia afresh that she could not understand these, but indeed almost everything they said was to her a veritable jargon of incomprehensibility. She only gathered that they were all very clever and artistic, and had read all the books, and seen all the plays, and heard all the music, in the world, and formed critical and discerning opinions about everything.

As for Grandpapa's Golden Rule—always to let the other people talk about themselves—nothing could be more evident than its total lack of prevalence in these cultured circles.

"You see, Wagner's message to *me* is almost a personal one. . . ."

"I must say, in my own case, the effect that he has on me is . . ."

"That's exactly what I felt myself. I must tell you how it strikes me. . . ."

Whenever any lady with a stronger voice or greater powers of determination than the others contrived to monopolize the conversation for a few minutes with personal reminiscences of her own, whatever she said was quite certain to remind each of her listeners of something very interesting about herself, about which she immediately began to tell anyone whom she could compel to keep silent.

The party consisted entirely of women.

Lydia felt thoroughly out of place and wished that she had never come.

Her only consolation was in watching another girl, younger than herself and even more unfashionably dressed, who sat silent at the other side of the table,

and looked as though she felt strongly inclined to burst into tears.

Lydia wondered whether this was another "wonderful discovery."

When lunch was at last over and they had gone into the drawing-room, which, to Lydia's horror, they filled with the smoke of their cigarettes, and two of the most eloquent ladies had snatched up their gloves and purses and fur wraps, and declared that they must *fly* for the Albert Hall, and had accordingly flown, Lydia saw her unhappy-looking *vis-à-vis* approached by Lady Honoret.

"It seems a great shame to ask you to sing now, but if you *could* manage it—I do want some of these friends of mine to hear you. . . ."

"Oh, certainly, Lady Honoret," said the girl, turning first red and then white.

It struck Lydia that she was much too frightened to refuse.

"*I* think it's a nightingale," lisped the hostess, turning to her other guests; and dropping her voice very slightly she added, for the benefit of those nearest to her:

"Straight, straight from the heart of Stepney. Artifis'al flowers, I believe."

"And did you find her, you wonderful thing?" inquired a guest with a deep, ardent voice.

Lady Honoret nodded her head several times, pursing up her mouth, after the fashion of a little girl.

Suddenly she struck her ringed hands together in a gesture of dismay.

"Accompaniments! Oh, Tottie, dear, *will* you?"

"I will," sacramentally replied "Tottie," who was tall and gaunt-looking.

"Then you must all come upstairs. It's not nearly such a good room for sound as this is, but my p'ecious, p'ecious Bechstein is there."

They all flocked out of the room and up to the first floor, where Lydia was amazed to see an even larger and more elaborately furnished room than the one downstairs, which she had supposed to be the drawing-room.

A heavy blue drapery worked in gold and scarlet with scaly dragons was reverently taken from the top of a grand piano and put on the back of a sofa, where several ladies stood transfixed with admiration in front of it, and "Tottie" took off all her rings and bracelet and a watch, and sat down upon the music-stool and got up again and altered its height, and struck three chords upon the piano, and then demanded of the pallid and bewildered-looking songstress:

"Where is your music?"

"I haven't got any music."

"But what about the accompaniment?"

"I always sing without anything at all," said the girl, whiter than ever.

"Without a piano?"

"Oh, yes," said the inhabitant of Stepney.

"Tottie" once more rose from the piano-stool, and resumed possession of her jewellery.

"Then we must all come downstairs," said Lady Honoret cheerfully. "It's *so* much better for sound downstairs."

Lydia was astonished that nobody seemed to be angry with the poor, foolish girl who had given them all this trouble for nothing, but they all trooped downstairs again, talking as complacently as ever.

When at last they were all seated and silent, the girl,

standing at the end of the room with her arms hanging straight down against her sides, began to sing in a high, clear voice a song which Lydia had never heard before and which seemed to her to have no tune whatever.

She very soon stopped listening to it.

Instead, she began to think of the singer's evident terror of her surroundings and lack of presence of mind.

Why had she been foolish enough to let them all come up to the room where the piano was, just now, when she must have known all the time that no piano would be necessary? Lydia supposed that it was from sheer fright.

And the girl had sat with a scared, white face all through lunch, and had hardly answered the very few words occasionally addressed to her.

Lydia did not feel much pity for her fellow-victim. She was merely engaged in criticizing her very evident short-comings, and in firmly resolving to avoid them herself.

When the girl had ceased to sing, she caught up her jacket with a nervous movement and declared that she must go, without waiting for any words of thanks or praise for her song. She almost scuttled out of the room, making a sort of agitated bow from the doorway that comprised everyone in the room.

What a fool, thought Lydia impatiently.

The sight gave her a sudden, new self-confidence. After all, learning through the mistakes of other people was an easy form of education.

When Lady Honoret came and sat down beside her Lydia looked up with a new self-possession.

"One can't, can't talk in a c'owd," said the hostess

plaintively, "but you must come some day when I'm quite alone. *Have* you brought your work?"

For an instant Lydia hesitated, giving the word its feminine connection with a needle and thimble, but she rightly concluded that Lady Honoret was referring to the typescript hidden in brown paper.

Lydia had been endeavouring to conceal the parcel all through the afternoon, not having had sufficient presence of mind to leave it with her umbrella in the hall. It was therefore with positive relief that she handed it to Lady Honoret.

"Oh, don't look at it now!"

But her hostess was recklessly tearing at the good brown paper—"what waste of a wrapping for some future parcel" involuntarily murmured the spirit of Uncle George within Lydia—and in another moment she had pulled out Nathalie's neat typescript.

"I think I'll go now," said Lydia. For the first time she felt a certain sympathy for the girl with the voice, who had rushed away after her song was over.

She stood up nervously. The eyes of Lady Honoret were glued on the pages which she was rapidly fluttering and turning, and she did not get up, although she pressed two of Lydia's fingers with an absent sort of gesture.

"Come again—ve'y, ve'y soon, dear child. We must talk about this," she murmured.

Lydia released her hand and looked round the room. The remaining visitors were engaged in conversation, or in scanning the pictures and miniatures on the walls.

Lydia, very upright and with her head held high, turned round and walked out of the room. Her umbrella was miraculously put into her hand by the manservant in the hall; the door was opened and shut again

behind her, and she stood on the pavement of Lexham Gardens and drew a deep breath.

"My goodness gracious!" said Lydia to herself, in the tense, straightforward phraseology of Regency Terrace. "My goodness gracious! What a house, and what manners they all had!"

This was the only unvarnished expression of her opinion that Lydia permitted herself.

She gave Miss Forster a careful and rather manufactured account of the luncheon-party; she mentioned to the other girls at Elena's that she had been introduced recently to a Lady Honoret who had twice invited her to her own house, and she wrote and told Aunt Beryl that Miss Forster's friend, Lady Honoret, had been very kind to her, and was going to read something she had written and tell her if anything could be done with it. Lady Honoret wrote herself, and was the friend of publishers.

Inwardly, Lydia was not without fears that her volatile patroness might forget all about her, and nothing more ever be heard of the novel and its possibilities, but in less than a week she received a summons to Lexham Gardens.

This time she said nothing at all to Miss Forster, but took the Cromwell Road omnibus, when her work was over for the day.

She regretted very much that she was not wearing the three-cornered hat, but only her every-day straw.

Lady Honoret, however, greeted her with outstretched hands and an enthusiasm that quite overlooked any such minor considerations. To her real astonishment, Lydia learnt that her novel was a tiny, tiny gem, a wonderful discove'y, and the truest and

purest return to the heart of Nature that Lady Honoret had read for years and years and years.

"Oh, the little *b'oken* heart!" breathed Lady Honoret piously, as she hung over the final pages of the typescript.

Of course, it was to go to a publisher—it would make a boom at once—it was so utterly new and young.

"But not Cassela," said Lady Honoret thoughtfully. "I think *not* Cassela. He goes in so tremendously for *strong* things, and your idyll is such a wee, wee tender little sto'y. Besides, he's got his discove'y—this Red Indian girl, or whatever she calls herself. This is to be all mine!"

Lady Honoret laughed in a gleeful, childish sort of way, and Lydia reflected coldly and ungratefully that a desire to outdo Mr. Cassela in the field of discoveries was probably at the bottom of her hostess's extreme enthusiasm.

Nevertheless, she felt very much excited, and she thanked Lady Honoret warmly and eagerly before she went away.

Was her book really so very good, she wondered? She felt a suspicion that work produced so very easily was unlikely to have any great intrinsic merit.

With considerable self-control, she said nothing whatever to anyone of the hopes that she now entertained, and which occasionally rose to immense and unreasonable heights, of an immediate accession to fame and fortune.

Every day she looked eagerly and nervously for further news from Lexham Gardens.

When it came at last she was astounded.

Her book was accepted—it was to be published as

soon as possible—the publisher thought well of it—she was to receive a draft agreement for her immediate consideration. . . .

This time Lydia cast discretion to the winds. She was wildly excited, and she told everybody that she had written a novel, and that it was going to be published at once.

"Do you mean printed, dear?" said Miss Nettleship, in an awed manner. "Well, I never! The boarders *will* be anxious to read it—they'll all think to see themselves."

This was no less than the truth.

Mrs. Clarence showed the extreme of apprehension, lest she should discover herself in the central figure of Lydia's novel, and seemed to credit the authoress with a supernatural power of insight enabling her to visualize her victim's past, present, and future alike.

"You writing people are so penetrating," she said anxiously to Lydia, "and there are certain passages in my life—oh, years before I ever came here—when I never thought I should live in a residential hotel, in fact, but had my own house and servants—but there have been incidents which I've always thought exactly like a novel. Only I couldn't bear to see my own character dissected in cold print."

Even Mrs. Bulteel, laughing rather nervously, said that she supposed writers were always on the look-out for copy, and they would all be afraid to open their lips in front of Miss Raymond now.

Mr. Bulteel congratulated her solemnly.

"I am afraid that I very seldom read novels myself, but we shall make a point of obtaining your book from the library. I have often been urged to write myself—some of my experiences in foreign countries would

certainly make interesting reading—but, I've always said, a writer has to have imagination. Don't you find that imagination is absolutely necessary to you?"

Lydia admitted that this was so.

"I believe," Mr. Bulteel pursued his reflective way, "I believe that I could express myself in sufficiently correct English. But I lack imagination. I am a practical man, I fear."

His fear, Lydia could not help noticing, was tinged with something that much resembled complacency.

"Perhaps, one day," said good Mr. Bulteel, smiling, "one day, you and I might collaborate over a book."

After that the book that Lydia and Mr. Bulteel were to write in collaboration became one of the mild, standard jokes of the boarding-house.

The congratulations which pleased Lydia least were those which she received from Miss Forster, who seemed inclined to look upon herself as the presiding genius of the situation.

"And to think it's all come from my having told my friend Lady Honoret all about you, that time when you were so down in the mouth last Christmas!" she cried exultantly. "Why, it was her taking you up that did the whole thing, wasn't it? I'm sure I'm delighted to have been able to do something really helpful like that for you, my dear!"

Lydia thanked Miss Forster, but without any great display of exuberance.

She did not expect any compliments from old Miss Lillicrap, nor did she receive any, but the girls at Madame Elena's were more enthusiastic.

"I hope it ends sadly," said Marguerite Saxon, hanging her head on one side. "I often like to weep a little weep over a story with a sad ending. I know it's fool-

ish to take a tale so much to heart, but I'm made that way. I get awfully absorbed in what I read. You know, when I put the book down it's as though I'd said good-bye to real friends. That's the way I feel, very often, about the people in the tales I read."

Gina Ryott's congratulations began better, but they, also, tailed off into personal reminiscences of her own. Lydia noticed it with impatience, but without any surprise.

"I can't imagine how you afford the time to write, I must say. I've always thought you must be clever, Lydia. You know, the way one can tell sometimes, without any rhyme or reason—oh, so-and-so seems to be *clever*. That's what I've often thought about you. A gentleman friend of mine always says I'm a judge of character, and somehow I think I must be. It's just a sort of knack, somehow. One sort of sizes people up right, the minute one sets eyes on them. I always know in a second what I think of anybody."

Lydia, after these two, heard with something like relief the practical comments of Miss Rosie Graham.

"Good for you! I hope they're going to pay you."

"I'm getting a royalty," Lydia explained. "That means so much on each copy sold. I daresay it won't be very much, especially as they say it's a very short book, and is only going to cost three-and-six instead of six shillings. But my friend, who arranged it all for me, says it's a very good agreement indeed for a first book."

"My-friend-who-arranged-it-all" was Lady Honoret. Thus did Lydia now freely describe that patroness of struggling art. Nor did she do so unjustified by Lady Honoret's further advances. Miss Forster might be invited to Bridge parties during the week, but it was

Lydia who was urged to come eve'y, eve'y Sunday and spend the afternoon, and meet all the dear people who had heard about her, and would be *longing* to read her book. It was Lydia who was introduced to all and sundry of the frequenters of the Lexham Gardens house as the very latest and youngest novelist, and after a little while she altogether ceased to resent the label of "actually serves in a shop, my dear!" which alternated with "little seamstress, in quite a tiny way," that formed the aside to the introductions.

It all seemed to add to her prestige with these extraordinary people.

She assimilated the new atmosphere with astonishing ease, and, being unhampered by shyness, soon acquired absolute ease in her surroundings.

Insensibly she became less interested in her work at Madame Elena's, and although the habit of concentration still prevailed, she was conscious of relief now, when each working day came to an end.

She ceased to cultivate the little cashier, Rosie Graham, since her advances never led to any permanent success, and, moreover, she could not altogether forget Rosie's strictures on the evening they had had supper together. Madame Elena went to Paris without leaving Lydia in charge, as she had half said she would do, and on her return seemed inclined to fall back into the old way of favouring Gina Ryott.

Early in the summer Marguerite Saxon's roseleaf face developed a series of spots that rapidly became sores, and Madame Elena remarked them, in spite of layers of thick white powder, and told Marguerite that she need not return until they were cured.

The wretched model sobbed and cried, asserting that she had used bottle upon bottle of "stuff," some of

which *must* soon take effect, but as the sore places spread daily, and two clients asked what was the matter with that girl's face, she received her dismissal, and the show-room at Elena's knew her no more.

"She was bound to end by ruining her skin with all that paint and stuff," said the other girls.

Lydia was not greatly interested. She examined her own clear olive complexion in the glass, and decided that the very moderate use of a small powder puff was not likely to have results that would bring upon her the disastrous fate of Marguerite Saxon, and thereupon dismissed the whole incident from her thoughts.

Full of tremulous excitement, she corrected the proofs of her novel, and waited for its appearance.

XVI

"FANCY about your book, dear!" wrote Aunt Beryl. "Well I *am* pleased. Aunt E. and Olive are back here now, and so surprised to hear your news. Mind you tell us when to order the book from the library. I always said you had it in you to write, dear."

Lydia could not remember any such flattering prediction, but she put Aunt Beryl's name down on the list of people to whom one of the six presentation copies of her book, that Lady Honoret had said she would receive, must be sent.

The list cost her a certain amount of thought.

Aunt Beryl went without saying—and of course, Lady Honoret, to whom it would be a real pleasure to present anything so certain to be rapturously received —Nathalie Palmer—rather a nuisance, that, perhaps? —but Lydia stifled the thought, with the remembrance that, after all, it was Nathalie who had typed the book —Grandpapa—one would like to show Grandpapa that even earning one's own living in London was not without its higher side—and then Uncle George would be hurt if he alone of the Regency Terrace household were left out—four copies gone already, and one to keep for herself—that was five—and Lydia surveyed with dismay the number of people to each one of whom she would have liked to send the remaining copy.

Mr. Monteagle Almond—who would think more highly of her intellectual attainments than ever—Miss

Glover, who had so much wanted to have Lydia on her staff of highly-qualified teachers—the Senthovens, who could themselves do nothing except play games—even Madame Elena passed through Lydia's perplexed mind as a possible candidate, for of late the principal had appeared to pay very little attention to her assistant. But, in the end, Lydia reluctantly decided that the sixth copy of her book must be given to Miss Forster.

There was a tendency about Miss Forster, slight but unmistakable, to show herself affronted at the ease and rapidity which which her protégée had risen to undreamed-of heights of intimacy in the Honoret establishment.

Lydia indeed, inwardly, was rather annoyed with Lady Honoret for her want of discretion. It had become quite difficult to answer Miss Forster's sharply-put questions as to the number of her visits to Lexham Gardens, on occasions when Miss Forster herself had received no invitation there.

Lydia had always been very popular at the boarding-house, and she felt that it would be unpleasant, and would spoil her triumph in the appearance of the book, if anyone were to feel injured and show vexation—particularly Miss Forster, who was also popular, and was, morever, always quite ready to exploit any emotion that she might be experiencing, in conversation with the other boarders.

Lydia planned to give her the book, and to inscribe in it a grateful inscription, and meanwhile she was careful to dwell upon the fact that she had never yet met Sir Rupert Honoret—whom Miss Forster, of course, knew so very well indeed.

Imperceptibly enough, however, the opinion of the boarders ceased to matter, just as that of the girls at

Madame Elena's had ceased to matter, a little while before.

Lydia's book was a success.

Some quality, at which the writer herself was secretly surprised, was found by the public and the reviewers alike in the slight little story. It met with something that very nearly approached the reception predicted for it so gushingly by the enthusiastic Lady Honoret.

Various people, their names for the most part well known to Lydia through the agency of Aunt Evelyn and her ladies' paper, asked to meet her, and her publisher's advertising-manager wrote and asked for her photograph, to appear in the Press.

Lady Honoret was triumphant.

"A child—a young, fresh child of eighteen—isn't it too, too Arcadian?" she would inquire of her friends, although Lydia, at first rather inclined to be offended at having such juvenility thrust upon her, had already distinctly stated that she was twenty.

Then, it seemed with paralyzing suddenness, the day came when Lady Honoret said to her without any preliminary at all:

"Why don't you leave that d'eadful shop—I'm sure it *is* d'eadful—and give up your *whole* time to your real work?"

Why?

Lydia could think of innumerable reasons, although she might not be disposed to put them before Lady Honoret.

Because it was well known to Aunt Beryl, Grandpapa, Rosie Graham, everybody—that to leave a good post unless it were for a better one, was a wanton and foolish flying in the face of Providence—because Mr. Monteagle Almond would revoke all his good opinion

of her, after she had justified his recommendation of her so splendidly—because Grandpapa would call her a little fool, whose head had been turned—and, finally, because the writing of a successful first novel could not be looked upon in the light of earning one's own living, as Lydia and Lydia's relations understood the term.

This last was the reason she chose to give Lady Honoret:

"I ought to do something for myself. My aunt and uncle, who brought me up, couldn't afford to have me living at home doing nothing at all—it wouldn't be fair."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Lady Honoret with a slight shudder. "I'm sure you oughtn't to live with any uncle and aunt—they're always such Philistines, too—but if you *really* have to think about the te'ible money part of it, of course you know you're bound to make a little money from writing. Only I suppose you simply can't bear to think of writing for money? It would paralyze it all?"

Lydia did not like to say that all that she was afraid of was that the money made by writing would be insufficient in quantity, so she remained silent, and Lady Honoret squeezed her hand sympathetically.

"You must think it all over, you dear little strange, wild thing," she declared affectionately, "and then if you settle to leave your shop, as I'm sure you ought, you must let me know."

And she said nothing more of her astonishing suggestion.

That was just the way of those new, strange people whom Lydia was now coming to know! They made the wildest and most revolutionary plans, proposing lightly such wholesale changes as the people from

whom Lydia sprang would never contemplate in a lifetime bound by tradition and practical considerations alike, and then, when one pleaded for time to assimilate the scheme, to weigh and consider it, and to consult one's relations, they brushed it all aside in a moment and seemingly forgot all about it!

Lydia marvelled at them, and was rather inclined to despise them for want of self-control, and lack of the bread-winner's early acquired self-discipline.

All the same, Lady Honoret's suggestion that she should leave the shop unwillingly allured Lydia, as holding vague possibilities of some higher, more splendid preferment in store.

One Sunday she found her patroness in despair over a little writing-table that was loaded with morocco-bound account-books, silver and enamel pencils, carved penholders and spoilt nibs, photographs in mosaic frames, a mosaic clock telling the wrong time, a china inkpot with ink running down its steep, purple sides, a small silver mirror on legs, and all round and underneath and on the top of all these, a vast quantity of detached bills and scribbled-over half-sheets of notepaper.

"These *mis'eable* accounts!" cried Lady Honoret quite desperately. "Sir Rupert has told me to put all these in order and let him have what he calls a statement, and all my charities are mixed up with personal expenses, and heaps of things I can't possibly let him see, and I've lost my cheque-book—though I don't really mind that, because I know I'm ter'ibly, ter'ibly overdrawn—but ev'ey time I add these things up they come diff'ent. Oh, *darling,* are you good at a'ithmetic?"

Lydia could never become in the least used to the

terms of endearment, so much in vogue amongst Lady Honoret and her friends, and "darling," in particular, was a word that she had never heard applied except to small children. She blushed involuntarily, and said:

"I am accountant at the place where I work, you know."

"Does that mean that you can y'eally, y'eally understand accounts?" demanded Lady Honoret, assuming an even more infantile guilelessness than was habitual to her.

"Oh, do take *all* these, and make the statement or whatever it is he wants. I'm so *tired!*"

"Is any of this private?" rather hesitatingly asked Lydia, brought up in that strict creed of reticence, as to money affairs, that is so essentially of the middle classes.

"Not in the least, darling," said her hostess languidly, and flung herself into an arm-chair with every sign of exhaustion, while Lydia sat down at the unbusiness-like little writing-table, of which she felt inwardly scornful, and began to disentangle its confusion.

Her task was not made any easier by the ceaseless flow of Lady Honoret's talk, and it took her over an hour to produce order from so much elegant chaos.

Then she said succinctly:

"Since the New Year fifty-five pounds have gone to various charities and societies—I have the list of accounts here—and all the rest is—is personal expenditure."

She did not like to say "clothes," although the bills were for nothing else, and there was not a single household item amongst them all.

"How much?"

"Two hundred and twenty-eight pounds, sixteen shillings and sixpence," said Lydia.

"Oh! Darling thing, you're so clever at all this—would you mind putting it all down on paper the other way round—the fifty for dress expenses, and the other to charity? He never asks to see the bills."

Lydia was thunderstruck.

"Cook the accounts?" She worded it bluntly in her confusion, but her voice was shaky.

"What a quaint expression!" said Lady Honoret delightedly. "Is that what you call it? Oh, yes, *do* cook them for me!"

No wonder that certain of the novels read by Lydia with so much interest talked about the immorality of the upper classes!

Lydia was highly scandalized, but she had not the slightest intention of risking Lady Honoret's friendship, and she "cooked" the accounts very neatly and skilfully.

"But if Sir Rupert asks to see the bills from the shops, or the receipts from the charity places?" she suggested.

"Then you'll have to come and help me to *cook* again, or I can always say I have lost them," Lady Honoret declared. "It may *sound* the teeniest bit deceitful"—it certainly did, reflected Lydia grimly—"but I make it a rule never to lie unless I *have* to, and then do it tho'oughly, tho'oughly well, you know. Sir Rupert really drives me to it sometimes—you've no idea what he's like."

Lydia rather wished that she had, and less than a week later her curiosity was gratified, and she met Sir Rupert Honoret.

He was quite unlike her conception of a wealthy Jew,

taken mainly from the stage. She had expected a pompous and corpulent presence, with a fur-lined coat, and a cigar, an immense hooked nose and a lisp. Instead she saw a small, wizened figure, with a broken front tooth, that gave him an oddly dilapidated appearance, prominent and rather bilious-looking eyes, and a discontented expression. His voice was low and nasal, and came with a peculiar hiss through the gap of the broken tooth.

"Are you the girl who does accounts?" he asked her.

Lydia's breath caught in her throat as she reflected how exceedingly probable it was that the financier had become aware of the particular direction in which her skill had recently taken her.

She shot a glance at Lady Honoret, who nodded gaily and quite openly.

"Yes," said Lydia.

"She writes, you know, Rupert. So ve'y, ve'y wonderful to think——"

"Are you fond of figures?" Sir Rupert demanded, ignoring his wife.

"Very."

"Any good at book-keeping? Double entry?"

"I've learnt it, and am working now as accountant."

"Where?"

"At a—a shop," hesitated Lydia. "A ladies' shop, called Elena's, in Day Street."

"Yes—run by an old woman called Ribeiro. I know."

Lydia looked upon him as nothing less than omniscient after that.

"D'you like the work there?"

Instinct made Lydia reply without enthusiasm:

"Pretty well."

"You'd like something better, eh? Can you do typing and shorthand?"

"No."

"Only accounts? Well, if you can keep those properly you can do more than most women."

He turned on his heel and went away without saying anything more, and it was with genuine astonishment that Lydia heard Lady Honoret exclaim:

"Oh, how, how clever of you! You've managed to get on the right side of Sir Rupert at once—and he *is* so difficult. Now I can have you here as much as I like, without his being disag'eeable."

Sir Rupert was not disagreeable. Once or twice he spoke to Lydia, and once he handed over to her an elaborate collection of figures, and asked her to "see what she made of that." Various unfamiliar terms, "shares" and "preference shares," "debenture stock," perplexed her, but the figures themselves could be capable of no combination too baffling for the mathematical mind, and Lydia tabulated very neatly and clearly the result of her work.

"Good."

Sir Rupert put the paper down.

"Give Ribeiro notice, and I'll make you my secretary at two pounds a week. You can have your luncheon here. Hours ten to six, and overtime when I want you. That will probably include Sundays as well."

"But—but—Lady Honoret. . . ."

"You can help her when I've nothing for you to do—but that won't be often. Think it over and give me an answer to-morrow."

Sir Rupert walked into his study and shut the door

almost in Lydia's face, leaving her completely bewildered.

It was an opportunity—it might lead to anything! Already Lydia had learnt to look upon even her new-found triumphs merely as stepping-stones to some further splendid destiny, the form of which she did not particularize.

After all, she was practically a shop-girl—that was all that her position at Madame Elena's represented, to those outside. Private secretary to Sir Rupert Honoret would be a very different thing. And her salary doubled—even Mr. Monteagle Almond would see no imprudence in making a change so much for the better.

Practical although Lydia undoubtedly was, she allowed her imagination a brief excursion into various alluring by-paths, such as the pleasure of telling Miss Rosie Graham and the other girls at Elena's that her services as a private secretary were so much in request as to have led to a flattering offer, that she felt it her duty to accept. . . .

She wondered whether lunch every day at Lexham Gardens would mean the dining-room and all Lady Honoret's smart friends, or merely a tray in the study. With the thought came one of those flashes of intuition to which Lydia owed a great deal more than she as yet knew.

The first person to approach must be Lady Honoret.

Lydia guessed already that Sir Rupert was not in the habit of taking his wife into his confidence, which made it all the more necessary that she, the latest discovery and protégée, should not allow herself to be annexed without reference to her original owner—the

light in which she could not help feeling sure that Lady Honoret regarded herself.

The effect of a tactful appeal proved to be its own immediate justification.

Lady Honoret at first looked startled, and then said, in a very open and candid way:

"Now I'll tell you the whole thing quite, quite f'ankly. . . ."

She then made several contradictory statements, to the effect that she had herself advised Sir Rupert to take Lydia for his secretary, and that, of course, she had no idea that he even thought of suggesting such a thing, but, then, he was hatefully secretive, always, and if Lydia did come, then of course Lady Honoret knew that she must never hope for her help over the d'eadful accounts and things any more, because, of course, she'd have no time for anything but stocks and shares, and advisory committees, and it would be far, far better for Lydia—darling thing—than the awful shop in Upper Tooting, and give her the chance of writing another wonderful novel, and meeting all sorts of critics and interesting people. . . .

Finally Lady Honoret exclaimed that it really all seemed just like a fai'y tale come true, and Lydia must leave the terrible shop the very next day and come to them.

Lydia reserved herself on the point, having long ago contemptuously decided that it was of no use ever to mention practical considerations to her patroness, but she went away with the assurance that Lady Honoret had definitely committed herself to a statement that she would welcome Lydia's presence, as Sir Rupert's private secretary, at Lexham Gardens.

Far-sighted as Miss Raymond's calculations might

be, she had as yet no thought of allowing for the repudiation of a spoken word.

That night Lydia carefully indited a letter.

"SIR RUPERT HONORET.

"DEAR SIR,

"I have considered your offer of a private secretaryship at £2 weekly and lunch in, and am prepared to accept same, after giving the usual week's notice to my present employer.

"If you can give me till the end of the month before coming to you I shall be obliged, as giving me time to take a few days at home and explaining to my people.

"Hoping to give you every satisfaction, as I shall certainly make it my endeavour,

"I remain,

"Yours faithfully,

"L. RAYMOND."

After that, much more rapidly and easily, she wrote to Aunt Beryl, and explained what a very flattering offer Sir Rupert's was, and how glad Lydia felt that now she would be able to pay all her own expenses, instead of letting Uncle George kindly undertake half of them. If she could, she would try and get a few days, to come and talk it all over before beginning her new work. And would dear auntie please explain it all to Grandpapa, and Uncle George, and Mr. Almond and everybody?

Lydia was not altogether without guile in relegating to Aunt Beryl the announcements to be made to, at all events, Mr. Monteagle Almond. After all, it was he who had found for her the post at Madame Elena's, of which they had all been so proud less than a year ago. Lydia did not wish him to think her either ungrateful

or capricious. She felt sure that Aunt Beryl would certainly be the best person to guard against any such unfavourable impression.

There were two announcements of her change of plans, however, which could not be deputed. Lydia was looking forward with pleasure neither to giving Madame Elena the week's notice stipulated for on her engagement, nor to explaining to Miss Forster that she was about to enter the establishment of Miss Forster's dear friends, to whom that lady had so very recently introduced her.

If Miss Forster made herself disagreeable, then Lydia decided that she would leave the boarding-house and live by herself in lodgings. But that would certainly offend Miss Nettleship, and perhaps Aunt Beryl as well, and Lydia had no desire to stand anything but well with everybody. It was a pity that other people were not more reasonable.

She spent some time in thinking out a tactful method of presenting her case to Miss Forster. Finally she did so with many expressions of gratitude for all that she owed to Miss Forster's kind introduction, and with a very distinct emphasis laid upon the subordinate position to be hers at Lexham Gardens. Not for her, Lydia implied, the freedom of the Bridge table and tea-party, as for Miss Forster. Merely an excellent business appointment, with a salary higher than her present one. And it was all Miss Forster's doing, and Lydia was so grateful.

To her extreme relief, Miss Forster was gracious. She took the credit for Lydia's triumph upon herself and apparently enjoyed telling all the other boarders of the far-reaching effects of her great influence with Sir Rupert and Lady Honoret.

Telling Madame Elena was less successful.

"A week's notice in the middle of the summer! What the dickens are you talking about?" demanded the auburn-headed principal, her eyes flashing fury.

"I've decided that clerical work will suit me better," Lydia said calmly.

"Can you type?"

"No, but it's easily learnt."

"Or write shorthand?"

"Not yet."

"And how many people, do you suppose, want a clerk that can't do either shorthand or typewriting?" said Madame Elena, with a fine irony.

Lydia was stung into an unguarded reply.

"I've already had a most excellent post offered to me, as it happens, Madame. Book-keeping is all that's wanted."

"That's exactly what I wanted to get at," said Elena, with one of her most disconcerting thrusts. "You've already taken on another job, you little rotter. That's a dirty trick, if you like."

Lydia kept silence, partly because it was really rather difficult to think of any very satisfactory reply, and partly from the old habit of deferring to authority.

She was feeling thoroughly uncomfortable, and had to tell herself inwardly that, after all, Madame Elena's opinion didn't *really* matter. A very few days after leaving the shop, and Lydia knew that Madame Elena and all her girls would seem to be shadowy and unreal as dreams.

The actual moment in which one discarded an outworn phase was unpleasant, but it was the way of progress.

"Just when I've taught you the work, too!" came the climax of this storm.

"I can stay on and show my work to anyone who is going to take my place," Lydia ventured.

"You can do no such thing. The quicker you clear out of here the better I shall be pleased," retorted the principal. "This day week you go, and I only wish I could send you packing straight away."

Elena flounced into her little room, slamming books and ledgers about noisily, and was in a terrible temper for the rest of that day.

Lydia told the other girls in the dressing-room in the basement at closing-time.

"You must have something very good up your sleeve to chuck this," said Gina Ryott. "It isn't everywhere that they give you a decent meal like ours."

"I know," said Lydia.

"You aren't getting married, are you?" said someone else, giggling.

"No fear."

"Is Peroxide furious? She was in the D's own temper this afternoon, I know that much."

"Old Peroxide doesn't like us girls to give notice. I suppose she thinks we ought to be only too thankful to stay on here for ever, with what she does for us."

"Do you know if anyone is taking on your job?" asked Rosie Graham.

"No one, yet. She'll have to find somebody in a hurry, because I'm leaving this day week."

"All right. I shall apply for it myself. I'm sick of that everlasting stool of mine behind the glass, and she can easily find another cashier. Just put me up to a wrinkle or two about your old ledgers and things."

"I will to-morrow," said Lydia promptly. "I hope you'll get on all right. It's a good job."

"Then why are you leaving it?"

"Because," said Lydia slowly, "I am going to be private secretary to Sir Rupert Honoret, at his own house in Lexham Gardens, for just exactly twice the money that I get here."

The announcement created all the sensation that she had hoped for. The girls congratulated her, and expressed their envy, and made much enthusiastic noise.

The little pale cashier, Rosie Graham, was the only one to keep silence, and she looked at Lydia with uplifted eyebrows and a mocking expression, that conveyed quite clearly an opinion nearly as unfavourable as Madame Elena's own of Lydia's methods of self-advancement.

But Lydia did not care any longer what Rosie might choose to think. After the next week she would probably never see her again.

Nevertheless, when she did say good-bye to the girls with whom she had worked for nearly a year, and with whom she had made herself so popular, Lydia exchanged really affectionate farewells with them, and echoed eagerly their plans for not losing sight of one another, but meeting on an occasional Sunday afternoon.

"I should like to hear how it's all getting on," she declared vehemently, taking a last look at the diamond-paned window, with the careless gilt lettering above it.

But, after all, the Sunday afternoon meetings did not take place.

Lydia had her holiday at Regency Terrace, and then she came back with a new silk frock, bought out of her savings, just in case lunch at Lexham Gardens should

ever turn out to mean Lady Honoret's dining-room table, and not a tray in Sir Rupert's study, and she became very quickly absorbed in new work, new surroundings, and many new people.

Lydia and the staff at Elena's now had really nothing in common.

XVII

SIR RUPERT HONORET gave his secretary a great deal of work to do, but he left her free to do it in her own way, and at her own time. He was very seldom in the study himself, except during the first hour of the morning's work. After that, he went off to the City. The time of his return was always uncertain and varied daily. Sometimes Lydia wondered whether his unheralded entries were occasionally made in the hopes of taking her by surprise.

It was something not unconnected with this suspicion, perhaps, that made her, as soon as her work was over, generally by four o'clock in the afternoon, try to teach herself typewriting.

A big machine stood on a table in a corner of the room, and presently Lydia learnt to manipulate it successfully.

Sir Rupert never made any inquiries as to her progress, but the first time that she handed him a typewritten letter for signature, he scrutinized it very carefully, suggested one or two alterations in the spacing and placing of the lines, and gave her a look which she felt to be one of approval.

It was a surprise to Lydia to find what a number of charitable organizations figured on the list of Sir Rupert's activities. He was on the committees of several hospitals, homes, and asylums, and a most regular visitor at one of the largest branches of the Borstal Institute.

The money that he expended upon charity seemed to Lydia to be almost unlimited, and the appeals that poured in daily formed the major part of the correspondence that she was required to sort. No application was to be left unanswered, and all were to be filed, indexed, and elaborately referenced and cross-referenced.

Lydia thought that she was beginning to understand why Lady Honoret had so glibly metamorphosed her dress-expenditure into her charitable donations, for Sir Rupert's inspection.

Lady Honoret never penetrated to the study. She frequently sent messages by a servant to ask if Lydia would lunch with her, and these invitations Lydia always accepted. On other days, the footman brought a well-furnished tray to the study.

At first, Lydia was a prey to that curious terror of servants that appears to be inherent in those unused to their presence. She would arrange herself in industrious attitudes for the footman's benefit, her back carefully turned to the door by which she expected him to enter, and would scrupulously avoid looking at him while he arranged the tray on a side table or put more coal on the fire.

Imperceptibly, however, Lydia's powers of adaptability made themselves felt. She said "Thank you" to William in quite an audible voice, and one day asked for a fresh supply of ink. When William replied, in a very matter-of-fact way, merely "Yes, miss," and the ink duly appeared, Lydia felt that she was really at one with her surroundings.

The two pounds a week that she was earning gave her a sense of wealth, and her book went into a second

edition and continued to receive excellent Press-notices.

She wondered whether Sir Rupert knew that he was employing as private secretary a novelist of undoubted distinction.

It was only Lady Honoret and her friends who ever talked about Lydia's literary achievement.

Sir Rupert, a silent man enough, only spoke to her, in his dry little nasal voice, about her secretarial work.

Lydia, half-suspicious of men after her adventure with Margoliouth, half-rendered so by the vague vulgarity of a hint received from Miss Forster, could not for an instant have deluded herself, even had she wished to do so, that her employer gave even the most passing thought to her possible attractions.

But the men who came to see him in his study sometimes looked at her with less unseeing eyes.

They were mostly old men, in Lydia's estimation at least, and the leering smile turned on her from time to time, or the occasional familiarity of a hand laid on her arm, afforded her but little gratification.

There was a young and very good-looking clergyman, however, who once came to see Sir Rupert and, in the midst of their long, low-voiced discussion of an East End family of Polish Jews, found time to glance at the slim figure of the private secretary, quietly writing in the far corner of the room.

She was called presently to enter another appointment for him to see Sir Rupert the following week.

"Four o'clock on Wednesday next, then. I have no other engagement, I think, Miss Raymond?"

"No, Sir Rupert."

"Put down Mr. Damerel—the Reverend C. Damerel —for four o'clock."

Lydia made the entry, and the young clergyman, looking at her, said, almost timidly:

"Thank you, Miss Raymond."

His instant use of her name flattered her, and he had a singularly attractive speaking-voice, low and musical.

On Wednesday Lydia, with a half-smile at her own secretly acknowledged vanity, put on her most becoming blouse and a ribbon in her hair.

At half-past three o'clock, Sir Rupert walked into the study and told her that she was free for the rest of the day, and might go at once. It was the first holiday he had ever offered her.

Lydia took advantage of the concession, since she could not very well do otherwise, and was in reality glad of it, but she wondered whether the good-looking young man would notice her absence.

That he had done so was made evident in his third visit, when his eager gaze instantly sought the corner where she sat, and as their eyes met, he smiled frankly.

After that, Lydia and he met frequently, although they seldom exchanged many words, except one afternoon when Sir Rupert was late, and Lydia had daringly offered the visitor a cup of tea.

Over the intimacy of the small tea-table, they had talked quite freely, and although Lydia had been a little bit disappointed at the very impersonal note maintained by one who so obviously admired her, she had attributed it to his profession. The impression chiefly left upon her mind had been of an extreme simplicity that was somehow mysteriously suggestive of good breeding.

It puzzled her the more from the contrast with Lady Honoret and her expansive friends. London clergymen surely weren't "anybody" as a rule, Lydia re-

flected sweepingly. Lady Honoret, whom no one, least of all the observant Lydia, could ever have accused of simplicity, was "somebody." So was each one of her talkative, elaborate familiars. They all of them, in various guise, proclaimed it of themselves. Their conversation advertised themselves and their importance incessantly.

" . . . Can't stay one *second,* dearest. The Duchess is *screaming* for me to come and finish our stall for the Fancy Fair. . . ."

"Don't *talk* about Calmar's New Symphony! Wretched creature! He had the audacity to ask me what I thought of it, and I was *perfectly* frank. I said there's only one way in which it strikes me, and that is —rococo!"

"Of course, I designed the dress. The dear lady put herself entirely in my hands, and the result was that it was the only costume in the room that was really of the period . . . people *raved* about it."

"No, my dear lady, I haven't a moment. My time is not my own; it belongs to the public—the wretched, reading, writing, advertising public."

This last was Cassela, the publisher.

He came to Lexham Gardens more and more frequently, and the rivalry between himself and his hostess as to "new discov'ies" appeared to have fallen into abeyance.

He had complimented Lydia very effusively on her book when it first came out, but after she had taken her place in the household as Sir Rupert's private secretary, he took very little notice of her, although he was almost always at lunch or in the drawing-room whenever Lydia was invited to either by Lady Honoret.

She seldom went to Lexham Gardens on Sundays,

although Sir Rupert had once or twice claimed an hour or two's work from her in the morning.

"Will that interfere with your hour of worship?" he once inquired solemnly.

"I can go to church in the evening," Lydia replied, "thank you, Sir Rupert."

As a matter of fact, Sunday, spent at the boarding-house, now seemed to her the dullest day of the week. There were no interviews with strangers demanding Sir Rupert—and who might turn out to be good-looking and impressionable like Mr. Damerel—nor brief, friendly greetings from habitués who came often to the study and knew Lydia well by sight, and there was no possibly exciting interlude in the middle of the day, when the people in the dining-room accepted her almost as a daughter of the house, Lydia sometimes thought, and very often made most flattering allusions to her novel.

The guests at the boarding-house seemed to her now incredibly dull. How could she ever have supposed them to be of my importance in the scheme of existence?

When Hector Bulteel, after numerous failures, at length passed his Matriculation, and the event was celebrated, with perhaps tactless insistence, by the Bulteels' fellow-boarders, Lydia joined civilly and even with a show of cordiality in their demonstrations, but at the back of her mind she was aware that the people with whom she now chiefly associated would look upon the achievement with a total absence of enthusiasm. Many of them, very probably, would not even know what Matriculation meant.

The boarders all read Lydia's novel, and Miss Nettleship actually bought a copy of it, for what she called "the drawing-room library," which consisted of half a

dozen torn novels in sixpenny editions, a copy of "Molly Bawn" with the last pages missing, and several unbound, and very old, numbers of *The Lady's Realm.*

All of them liked Lydia's book, and Mrs. Clarence remarked with melancholy pleasure that she had cried over it to the extent of having to fetch a clean pocket-handkerchief before she could finish the last chapter. But although Lydia was not less popular, the boarders were now a little bit more reserved with her, showing all that curious nervousness that assails the semi-educated mind coming into contact with accredited "cleverness."

Lydia's "cleverness" was an established fact now that she had published a book and secured the position of Sir Rupert Honoret's secretary for herself.

Sometimes they asked her about her work.

"Mostly accounts, but I answer a good many business letters, and file and index them."

"And you meet interesting people, don't you, dear?" said Mrs. Bulteel hungrily.

"Oh, yes."

But Lydia did not vouchsafe many details to these eager listeners, partly because she did not want to rouse Miss Forster's jealousy, and partly because she could never quite forget Grandpapa's old advice: "Always let the other people talk about themselves."

It somehow seemed better to turn the conversation into the direction of that winter when the Bulteels had gone to Switzerland, and made the acquaintance of an Irish viscount and his wife, staying at the same hotel as themselves, or to let Miss Forster tell the story of the wonderful luck she had had playing Bridge at her club with the Honourable Mrs. Harry Maudesley as her partner.

Lydia did not spend very much time at the boarding-house now, although she had again begun to write a book in the evenings.

She was often kept overtime at Lexham Gardens, and, coming in late, would find that Miss Nettleship had kept a plateful of meat and vegetables for her in the oven, which was put before her baked very dry and almost too hot to eat. But she was rather glad of the excuse for having the dining-room all to herself, and going straight upstairs to her bedroom afterwards, without joining the dull group in the drawing-room.

When the summer was half over, Sir Rupert told Lydia that she could have a month's holiday.

"We shall spend all August in Scotland, and perhaps longer," he said gloomily.

"You'll want me again when you get back to London, won't you?" asked Lydia quickly.

"Certainly. I'll let you know. Leave me your address."

The question of her address during that month of freedom, was the very one that Lydia was beginning to turn over in her own mind. Of course there was Regency Terrace, but then she had spent several days there only a very little while ago, and August was really an intolerable month for the residents at the little seaside town. Also, the society of Aunt Beryl and Uncle George, with the Jacksons and Mr. Monteagle Almond for sole variety, was not very exhilarating. Grandpapa was growing very old, and had long since ceased to honour Lydia with any of his entertaining soliloquies; indeed his cynical pronouncements now had lost their originality and point, and become like the dim, old-fashioned platitudes of the bygone age to which Grandpapa belonged. Perhaps a few days at

the end of the month for Regency Terrace, but Lydia thought that her holiday as a whole could very well be spent in Devonshire, paying that long deferred visit to Nathalie Palmer.

Her letters to Nathalie during the past year had certainly been much less expansive than those written when first they had parted at the end of their school days together, but she had sent Nathalie a copy of her book and had received a rapturous appreciation in reply.

Lydia that evening wrote to Nathalie—a letter no longer than those that she was in the habit of sending, but explaining that her work lately had taken up all her time, and that she had also begun to try and write another book. Sir Rupert and Lady Honoret were going away for August and Lydia was to have a holiday, and was longing to get away from London and have a complete change and rest. Her plans weren't quite settled, however, because though Aunt Beryl would always love to have Lydia at home, at the same time Grandpapa was getting very old, and must be considered, and people coming and going always disturbed him. But of course it would be nice to help Aunt Beryl, who certainly had more to do than she could manage.

Lydia was rather ashamed of the conscious insincerity with which she wrote that last sentence, but she let the letter go.

Nathalie's eager invitation came by return of post.

It was pleasant to tell the boarders, when they discussed plans for the summer, with a certain harassed enjoyment in the much-debated topic, that one had an invitation to spend a month with a school friend in Devonshire.

"Oh, how glorious! Is it moor, or seaside?"

"Not far from Dartmoor, I think. It's just on the borders of Cornwall and Devon."

"How lovely! I thought of the Cornish coast myself," said Mrs. Clarence casually, "but on the whole I think I shall stick to Cromer. It's not so much of a journey."

Old Miss Lillicrap cackled disagreeably at this undeniable truth, and Mrs. Clarence grew very red.

"Shellness for us, I suppose," said Mr. Bulteel cheerfully. "We've been to the same rooms for three years now—this'll make the fourth—and I don't know that we can do better."

"I've written a very plain letter to Mrs. Bett, though," said his wife sharply. "She ought to know what we expect by this time, but you remember we had a fuss last year because she wouldn't give us a hot sweet on Sundays. I'm not going to have any more nonsense of that sort. If she can't do the little we require, then we must go elsewhere, that's all. I'm sure there's plenty of choice."

Everybody looked rather admiringly at Mrs. Bulteel, who could afford to speak thus.

Only Miss Forster made a spirited show of having a choice of her own, too.

"Of course, Scotland is jolly at this time of the year, but I've got a dear friend who's taken a wee cottage in the Fen country, and I may join forces with her. Though, of course, I *could* spend August and September in paying visits, but that means such a lot of travelling."

"Too expensive," indelicately said the outspoken Miss Lillicrap. "Look at what tips for the servants alone comes to."

The allusion naturally closed the conversation.

Lydia, however, had derived from it inspiration.

"Do you know what Miss Nettleship is doing for a holiday?" she inquired privately of Miss Forster, who always knew everything.

"She wants to get away for a fortnight, if she can get a friend to come here just for the time. I'm sure she needs a change; she hasn't been away for nearly twelve months, and you know what a worry she's had, one way and another——"

Miss Forster stopped self-consciously, obviously on the very brink of an allusion to the Margoliouth episode.

Lydia wrote to Aunt Beryl.

Miss Nettleship really *did* want a change, and though Lydia hadn't said a word to her, she couldn't help thinking that if Auntie asked her down to Regency Terrace, it would be a weight off her mind, and do her all the good in the world. She could have Lydia's room, and Lydia really would like to think of her there —she had always been so kind. And if things were arranged like that, then Aunt Beryl needn't worry about Lydia for a moment, because Lydia would simply accept the urgent invitation that she had so often put off or refused, to pay Nathalie Palmer a visit at the Devonshire Rectory. Aunt Beryl remembered Nathalie, of course?

Aunt Beryl remembered Nathalie quite well, and it would be nice for Lydia to stay with her friend. A disappointment, of course, to all of them, not to see her at home; but perhaps Devonshire would be more of a change, and Maria Nettleship had certainly been very kind—it would be a real pleasure to try and make it up to her a bit.

So Miss Nettleship received, and gratefully accepted, the invitation to occupy Lydia's room at Regency Terrace, and Lydia herself, unable to help feeling that everything had been arranged in the most masterly manner, was able to take her place in a crowded train in all the heat and smoke of Paddington station, prepared to enjoy a new experience with no troublesome *arrière-pensée* in the background to spoil things.

She could not remember that she had ever been to "the real country" before, although Uncle George's Sunday walks had often taken them right away from shore and tram-line, to charming little woods or picturesque farmhouses.

But Devonshire, Lydia had learnt from books and from Nathalie's eager descriptions when she was a homesick little girl at Miss Glover's school—Devonshire was different.

The country that the train was rushing through with so few stops grew prettier and more wooded, the soil richer, the green more luxuriant.

Presently there was a stop at Exeter, and Lydia knew that she must be nearing her destination, the little station with the double name, that Nathalie had warned her would come almost immediately after the glimpse of Dartmoor.

There was a sudden change in the character of the scenery—a barren and beautiful expanse, dotted with grey boulders and with a tumbling stream foaming across it—and Lydia heard an old country-woman observe to her neighbour:

"There's ole Dartymoor, same as ever."

She pulled her hand-bag down from the rack, feeling strangely excited, and hastily put on her gloves just as the train slowed down and stopped.

"Clyst Milton and Ashlew!"

Would Nathalie have changed—would they even recognize one another?

Lydia stepped out of the train, for once inclined to nervousness.

But reassurance was at hand. Nathalie had *not* changed—there she was, come to meet her friend, with the same trustful welcome shining in her blue eyes, and her fair hair twisted up under a plain straw hat instead of hanging in a slender little pigtail, that had never attained to half the weight and length of Lydia's own two plaits.

"Oh, Lydia! I *am* glad you've come."

"So am I! You haven't changed a bit. Oh, my trunk! Is it out?"

The train had begun to move already.

Nathalie turned composedly to the only porter.

"There's a trunk from London. Is that it, Lydia, down at the far end?"

"That's it," Lydia declared, relieved by the sight of her neat yellow trunk, standing solitary on the little platform.

"Badcock will bring it along. The trap's outside," Nathalie said to the porter. "Let's come."

Lydia followed her, feeling slightly amazed. The old Nathalie had certainly never possessed a manner of any assurance at all, and moreover it impressed the town-bred visitor to see that the railway-porter actually *knew* Nathalie, and said "Yes, Miss Palmer," as he lurched away to fetch the trunk.

She was still more impressed by the sight of the "trap," a tall four-wheeled dog-cart with a white horse between the shafts, its head fastened to the station railings.

Nathalie untied the piece of rope, stowed it away at the back of the cart and climbed into the driving seat, talking all the while.

Lydia, who had never climbed into a dog-cart before, was not happy, but she performed the feat as unconcernedly as she could, having carefully watched Nathalie's movements.

The trunk was hoisted into the back, Nathalie said "Thank you, Badcock," jerked the reins slightly, and drove off.

An unusual, and quite unexpected, sensation of shyness caused Lydia to talk rapidly about the heat of the journey, and the beauty of the steep lanes through which they drove—anything that was impersonal.

Nathalie responded happily and naturally, but Lydia thought that she, too, was feeling a little shy.

"What a pretty house!"

"That's Quintmere. The Damerels live there."

Lydia wondered where she had heard of the Damerels before. Then she suddenly remembered.

"Oh, is one of them a clergyman in London?"

"Mr. Clement is. Why—do you know him, Lydia? How funny!"

"He comes to see Sir Rupert Honoret on business. I've seen him sometimes. Does he live at that house?"

"His mother does—Lady Lucy. She's nice—awfully old. The eldest son was killed out hunting last winter—no, the winter before. Don't you remember? I wrote to you about it. It was awful. Poor father had to go and tell Lady Lucy."

"Lady Lucy!" Then the young clergyman *was* "somebody."

Lydia was speechless.

Nathalie went on, speaking very seriously:

"Of course, the Squire being killed like that was dreadful—he was only thirty-five. Luckily he's left a son—a dear little boy. He and his mother, Mrs. Damerel, live with Lady Lucy at Quintmere now."

"And what does the other son do—the clergyman? Does he live in London?"

"He does now. I suppose he'll have the living when father retires—it's in Lady Lucy Damerel's gift. You remember father, of course, Lydia?"

Lydia said that she did, quite well, and presently they drove through Ashlew village, where Nathalie exchanged a number of greetings with the people they met, and then up a short, steep drive to the Rectory door.

It was not a very pretty house, but completely smothered in ivy, and with shabby, chintz-furnished rooms—full of flowers and littered with papers—that seemed to Lydia's unaccustomed eyes very large and bright.

She felt that somehow she had never expected Nathalie to have a home so like a Rectory in a book.

The Rector came in for tea, and his long, rather solemn face, crowned by a high forehead and sparse white hair, struck Lydia as resembling that of a horse. He spoke to her in the kind, slow way that she remembered, and asked questions about her book.

Nathalie poured out the tea, and it caused Lydia an unreasonable surprise to see her doing it. Somehow, she had never imagined Nathalie any older or more grown-up than when they had parted at school.

Nathalie had just gone home, and lived there ever since—she herself, in her letters, had often said that nothing ever happened at Ashlew, and Lydia had been slightly struck with the contrast to her own varied

days—independent livelihood at Elena's, the boarding-house, the publishing of a successful novel, the new position as Sir Rupert Honoret's secretary. Even her experience with Margoliouth had been a dramatic affair, although she had never written of it to Nathalie.

And yet here was Nathalie, who had done nothing at all, sitting indefinably poised and "grown-up" and more at her ease, Lydia felt certain, than was her visitor.

However, she enjoyed the evening, and the novelty of sitting on the lawn with the just-arrived London paper after tea, while Nathalie went down to the school on her bicycle, because Mr. Palmer said that the schoolmistress wanted to speak to her about the infant class in the Sunday school most particularly.

She also enjoyed supper, which they had on a wooden table in the garden, just under the dining-room window, from which the pink-faced maid handed them out the bread sauce and peas and potatoes for their roast chicken, and the dishes of raspberries and clotted cream that concluded the meal.

"We must see what our country fare can do towards fattening you up, while you're with us," said the Rector. "You look as though you were in need of a rest."

"She works so hard, father," said Nathalie proudly.

"I know, my dear. We must try and make this a real holiday."

Lydia was touched and gratified at their kind solicitude.

She acquiesced gratefully when Nathalie suggested that she must be tired, and would like to go to her room early.

The room was a very pretty one, seeming enormous after Number Seventeen at the boarding-house, and

with a comfortable deep arm-chair near the bed, and a little vase of red, scented roses on the dressing-table.

"Oh, it's lovely!" ejaculated Lydia in spontaneous delight at so great a contrast to any surroundings that she had ever known before.

"I'm next door," said Nathalie, "and the bathroom is beyond the landing—only I'm afraid the water's not very hot in the mornings. Breakfast at eight, but don't hurry; Lydia, dear, I won't stay and talk to you to-night, but it's *splendid* to think I've really got you here at last."

The enthusiasm of Nathalie's words, and good-night kiss, assured Lydia that her adoring junior at Miss Glover's still survived in the youthful lady of the house of Ashlew Rectory.

She went to sleep at last in the unaccustomed silence, a little bewildered and surprised still, but happily confident that here, as elsewhere, she would very soon regain her usual serenity of outlook and find her rightful place.

XVIII

LYDIA's rightful place at the Rectory was found even more quickly and easily than she had hoped.

She helped Nathalie with her Blanket Club accounts, she contributed most valuable garments, made by herself quickly and deftly during the long, pleasant evenings, to the Maternity Bag, and she begged to be allowed to relieve Nathalie sometimes by reading aloud at the meetings of the Mothers' Union. It was gratifying to see how much the mothers appreciated it, when the Rector told them that this was his daughter's friend, who was taking a well-earned holiday from hard work in London.

The Rector and Nathalie could hardly say enough of Lydia's eagerness to join in all the activities of their large and straggling parish, and both expressed a naïve admiration for her wonderful aptitude over details which must be so new to her.

But Lydia enjoyed it all, and also enjoyed her own quickness, that admittedly so far surpassed Nathalie's rather automatic performance of her many duties, and the sense of being a great success, and really helpful to the kind and hospitable Palmers.

The old intimacy between herself and Nathalie had revived very quickly, and it surprised and flattered Lydia to see the eagerness displayed by her friend to hear all about her life in London.

But she did not tell her a very great deal. It was always a mistake to talk very much about oneself, and

the Rector had seemed to think it rather a pity that Lydia should be working for the Jewish Sir Rupert Honoret. More successful, somehow, to keep the conversation to the great novelty that she found in a country life, and her enjoyment of the Saturday afternoon cricket matches, attended by Nathalie always, and her father whenever possible, as a matter of course.

"I suppose I'm so used to them, and—it's very slack of me—but I do get rather tired of always getting the tea ready," Nathalie confessed.

"Do you give the tea?"

"The Cricket Club funds are supposed to provide it, but Lady Lucy lets us have the crockery and Mrs. Damerel often comes down to help. The Squire used to play, you know. And Mr. Clement Damerel sometimes plays when he's down here. We may see him this afternoon."

Lydia felt rather pleased, and put on a new pink frock that she had copied from one of Nathalie's neat prints, because her customary long skirts and frilly blouses had somehow seemed out of place at the Rectory.

She went down with Nathalie to the cricket ground in the middle of the village, early in the afternoon.

"We call at the post-office for the key of the cricket pavilion," said Nathalie, quite matter-of-factly.

The postmaster gave them the key, and they also called at the baker's for a very large basket containing long loaves of yellow saffron cake.

The pavilion was a small, match-boarded erection, painted in green, and with a little wooden fence all round it. Within this enclosure, Nathalie and Lydia erected a trestle table, and from inside the pavilion they extracted a quantity of enamel mugs and plates, with

two knives for cutting up the cake and spreading butter on the splits, as Nathalie called the round, white buns that Lydia had taken for scones.

"That's splendid, Lydia! How quickly you do it. You see, we hand out the tea over the paling, then they eat it on the grass outside. The urns will come down presently from Quintmere."

"What fun it is!" said Lydia.

"I wish you were always here!" cried Nathalie. "You'd make *anything* fun, and I sometimes get so tired of it all."

Nevertheless, she went on spreading butter rapidly, and the splits were piling up on the enamel plates.

"Here's Mrs. Damerel," said Nathalie presently. Lydia looked up curiously, and felt rather disappointed at the sight of the Squire's widow.

Mrs. Damerel was very tall, dressed in a short black skirt and a black shirt made very plainly indeed, a small black veil hung from her hat, denoting her widowhood, and she had the red, weather-beaten complexion of the hunting woman, with a very much turned-up nose and prominent teeth. She did not look more than thirty, but as a pathetic young widow, Lydia thought her appearance a failure.

"Good afternoon, Nathalie," she said in a short, clipping way. "What a lot you've done! Billy and I came down to see if we could help."

"Thank you, Mrs. Damerel. This is my friend, Lydia Raymond, who's staying with us," said Nathalie shyly.

"How d'y do?"

Mrs. Damerel shook hands, which Lydia had somehow not expected her to do.

"Quite well, thank you," she replied politely, and

there was a pause, while Mrs. Damerel pulled off her gauntlet gloves, revealing an unexpectedly white pair of hands.

She gave the two girls very efficient help, and the dishes of food were all ready and set out in the shade, covered with clean cloths, before the match had even begun.

"The urns are coming down at four o'clock. Lady Lucy will be driving down," said Mrs. Damerel. "Where's Billy?"

They left the cool shelter of the little pavilion and went outside to find Billy, a fair child in white flannels, better-looking than his mother.

"The other team has just arrived," he shouted excitedly, and a wagonette crowded with men and boys jolted slowly to a standstill outside the ground.

It was all new to Lydia, and she sat in the brilliant August sunshine and watched the groups of men on the ground, the rosy Devonshire school-children rolling about the grass, under the shade of some great elm trees, and the arrival of a number of village folk who took their places on forms conveniently placed for watching the match.

Mrs. Damerel spoke to many of them, and presently sat down on one of the benches, with Billy on the ground at her feet, playing with a big dog that seemed to belong to them, and of which Lydia felt rather nervous.

Nathalie said to her apologetically:

"I must go and score, Lydia. We're a man short, because Bert Greenaway isn't here, and the man who generally keeps the score has been put in first. I don't suppose he'll stay in long, though, and then I can come back. We've won the toss."

She went to sit at a little table under a black-board on which a few figures, incomprehensible to Lydia, were chalked up, and busied herself with an enormous sheet of heavily scored paper.

Lydia tried to remember all that she had ever heard about cricket from the Senthovens.

What a long way off the Senthovens seemed—and London, and the girls at Elena's, and even Sir Rupert's study.

As she smiled at the thought, a voice beside her suddenly recalled to her with surprising vividness the very atmosphere of the Lexham Gardens house.

"How do you do, Miss Raymond? I never expected that we should meet down here."

It was Clement Damerel, looking unfamiliar in dark-grey flannels.

Lydia flushed with surprise and jumped up. They shook hands.

"I never saw you arrive," she said rather naïvely.

"I've been talking to Miss Palmer. She told me you were staying with her, and that you'd been kind enough to remember our meetings in London. You're having a holiday, I suppose?"

"Yes. Sir Rupert and Lady Honoret have gone to Scotland."

"I've got a fortnight, too. Isn't this glorious after London? Have you met my mother yet?"

"No. I've only seen her in church, and then I was up in the choir, because Nathalie—Miss Palmer—was playing the organ. Lady Damerel had gone when we came out."

Lydia had heard Nathalie and her father speak of "Lady Lucy," but she felt sure that in a stranger this would sound like impertinent familiarity.

"My mother will be down here presently," said Clement Damerel. "She doesn't often miss a cricket match."

He stayed beside her on the grass, watching the game, eyes screwed up against the sun.

"That's a good bowler they've got—he'll have Davy out in a minute, you'll see. . . . No, that's the end of the over . . . the man at this end is a good man—if he's wise he'll block every ball until he gets his eye in. . . . Are you interested in cricket?"

"I'm enjoying this very much," Lydia said, "but I don't know much about the game. I used to play with some cousins——"

Mr. Damerel certainly was not at all like the Senthovens, the only other people Lydia had known who were much interested in games.

Although he watched the match and called out "Well hit, Mr. Yeo, well hit!" when a boundary was scored, and although he clapped generously when a slow ball unexpectedly sent Davy's middle stump flying, he was all the time attentive to Lydia, addressing his conversation to her, and seeming really interested in everything she said.

When Davy walked sheepishly away from the wicket, unfastening his pads as he came and handing them to his successor with the bat, Nathalie was set at liberty.

"I'll put myself down for a duck's egg, Miss Palmer," said Davy, grinning ruefully.

Nathalie laughed, and came to join her friend.

Lydia was on the whole not sorry to welcome her. Although at Regency Terrace it might be considered bad form to break into a *tête-à-tête* between any girl and any young man, her experience at Lexham Gardens had shown her that this rule was not by any means

universally prevalent, and moreover she was beginning to find it a strain to show herself as consistently charming and intelligent as Mr. Clement Damerel quite obviously considered her to be.

With four o'clock there came a break.

Two large urns were lifted on to the trestle table by a man in groom's livery, who touched his hat to Nathalie, and Clement Damerel got up and made his way to a small, old-fashioned pony-carriage just drawn up under one of the further elm trees.

"Shall we make the tea, Lydia?"

Little muslin bags of tea leaves were at the bottom of each urn, and boiling water was miraculously procured from immense kettles that appeared to have spent the afternoon over a fire of sticks concealed behind the pavilion.

Nathalie emptied milk and sugar with a practised hand into the tea-urns.

"We always give it to them ready mixed," she said with finality.

Lydia felt no inclination to criticize. Everything at Ashlew, imbued with the immemorial traditions of a country parish, seemed as much beyond criticism as might be some age-old law that had remained unbroken throughout centuries.

They handed mugs of tea and plates of cake and splits across the wooden palings, and Billy Damerel came to ask for some tea for his mother, and carried a brimming mug carefully away with him.

Mrs. Damerel remained seated between two village matrons, talking to them in her abrupt yet unembarrassed manner, but the old lady in black, whom Lydia had vaguely discerned in the pony-cart, presently

descended, and came slowly across the grass, leaning on her son's arm.

If Mrs. Damerel's appearance had been a disappointment to Lydia, that of Lady Lucy Damerel was an even worse shock.

She was small and old, with wisps of untidy white hair blowing round her face, under a big mushroom hat of black straw, whereof the edges were unmistakably frayed, her black dress was of a cut and antiquity that even Aunt Evelyn, who reputedly "had no time to think about appearances," would have disdained, and she wore a large pair of clumping black boots.

Lydia thought of Lady Honoret's ruffled tea-gowns, and picture hats, and innumerable sparkling, jangling rings, and chains and lockets, and felt that Lady Lucy Damerel really could be no one so very important, after all.

Even her voice, as she greeted Nathalie by her Christian name, had not the peculiar distinction that was noticeable in her son's.

"Is your father coming down?" she asked Nathalie.

"I'm afraid he won't be back in time. He's had to take a funeral at Clyst Milton Halt this afternoon."

"Is that the Beer baby?"

"Yes."

"Ah, poor Mrs. Beer. I want to get over and see her one afternoon, but it's a long way for the old pony. They sent over the eldest boy to ask for some flowers yesterday."

Lady Lucy sat down on one of the wooden benches, and began to talk amiably to Lydia.

"Is this your first visit to Devonshire?"

"Yes. I think it's lovely."

"There's no place like it," said Lady Lucy, with the calm of conviction. "My son tells me that you work in London. Do you find that interesting?"

"Very interesting."

Lydia gave a few details, shyly, and Lady Lucy listened with the same attentive interest that her son had shown, and which Lydia, in her, found even more surprising, remembering the scant courtesy accorded by Lady Honoret and her friends to one another's discourse.

Finally the old lady said to Nathalie:

"Have you a free afternoon next week, my dear, when you can bring Miss Raymond up for some tennis?"

"We should like to very much, Lady Lucy, thank you. Any day except—let me see, Friday is choir-practice, and on Tuesday I suppose Mrs. Damerel will have the G.F.S. girls at Quintmere?"

"So she will. What about Monday, Clement?"

"Splendid," said her son.

"Then about four o'clock, my dear. And tell your father I'll try and see Mrs. Beer as soon as I can get down-along to Clyst Milton Halt."

She made use of the Devonshire idiom with the utmost naturalness. Lydia, who had thought it provincial from Nathalie and her father, was again very much surprised.

"Good-bye," said Clement Damerel, "we shall meet again on Monday, then."

They met again on Monday, and on several other occasions.

Lydia inwardly commended her own foresight of long ago in letting the Senthovens bully her over innumerable games of tennis. She might, and indeed did,

lack practice, but she had only to say so, and thanks to Bob and Olive, she knew that her style was good.

She played as often as possible at the Rectory against Nathalie, whose game was an admirable one, and her strokes improved every day.

It was satisfactory to write to Aunt Beryl, knowing that the information would filter through to Miss Nettleship, and thence to all the boarding-house people: "Yesterday Nathalie and I went up to Quintmere again and played tennis. The clergyman son, Mr. Clement Damerel, plays awfully well. He and I won a set against Nathalie and another man who is staying there. Old Lady Damerel is awfully nice. She doesn't seem to know anybody much outside Devonshire; she didn't even know who Lady Honoret was. I like her better than her widowed daughter-in-law, who lives with her, called Mrs. Damerel. I am having a ripping time, auntie."

Nothing could be more appreciative than Aunt Beryl's reply. Although not apt to be eloquent in correspondence, for which she rightly said that she had no time, Aunt Beryl, prompted evidently by Aunt Evelyn and the fashion paper's Society supplement, was quite expansive about the Damerels.

"Aunt E. was so interested in what you say about the Quintmere family," she wrote. "A girl she had for a short time at Wimbledon was in service at young Mrs. Damerel's home before she was married. She was the Honourable Joyce Pountney, quite a well-known old Devonshire family. So glad you're meeting nice people and getting plenty of fun, dear. Make the most of your time—you'll only be young once, as the books say. Aunt E. asks me to give you her fond love

and Olive's—the latter is still very seedy, and as thin as a lath, poor girl! Aunt E. also wants me to say that the old lady is Lady *Lucy* Damerel, and was the daughter of some Lord Somebody or other—excuse details, as you know my poor memory. It would be considered quite a solecism to call her 'Lady Damerel.' Hope you don't mind me mentioning this, dear."

Lydia did not mind at all. Hers was never the trivial vanity that resents criticism, and she was only too pleased to find herself guarded from possible future errors. She was enjoying her visit to Devonshire more and more.

The weather was fine almost all the time, but Lydia found, to her surprise, that Nathalie went out just the same whether it rained or not.

"We couldn't let it make any difference, you know," the Rector's daughter explained. "In the autumn down here it rains nearly every day—a sort of wet mist that's just the same as rain, anyway. Only your boots aren't very thick, Lydia."

They were not—in fact, it was very obvious that Nathalie only spoke of the thin, patent-leather, high-heeled things as "boots" by courtesy.

Lydia remembered Lady Mary Damerel's substantial footwear, and bought a pair of thick country shoes the next time that they went into Clyst Milton.

When she had been nearly three weeks at the Rectory Clement Damerel returned to London.

"I hope I shall see you there some time," he said to Lydia.

She felt flattered, and hoped so too, but Mr. Damerel was a slight puzzle to her.

She supposed that it was because he was a clergy-

man, that, although he obviously liked her society, he did not suggest taking her out to tea some Saturday afternoon, which surely he could easily do in London. However, he had definitely given her to understand that his business with Sir Rupert Honoret was likely to be of indefinite duration, and Lydia knew that they would meet again.

She was attracted by the young clergyman, by something in him which she inwardly described to herself as "high-class," by his good looks, of the fair, athletic type, essentially opposite to her own, and by his deferential courtesy to herself.

She thought that it was a pity he should be a parson. Clergymen were all very well, but apparently they were unable to let themselves go quite as other young men might have done, to the pleasant cultivation of a passing attraction.

Lydia gave no thought to anything more enduring than a passing attraction, partly because the Margoliouth episode had confirmed her strongly in the belittling view of sexual adventure that was hers by temperament, and partly because, although her imagination had been slightly stirred by Damerel, her emotional capabilities were as utterly undeveloped as her strong and ambitious mentality was overmatured.

Before she went back to London the Rector spoke to her gently and kindly of her life there.

"You are very young to be living by yourself, if I may say so. Nathalie tells me that this lady, in whose house you lodge, is a friend of your aunt's?"

"Yes. She's very nice."

"Yes—yes. I am sure of it. And she takes care of you—sees that you eat enough, and don't sit up too late at night writing those clever stories?"

"She takes great care of me," said Lydia, smiling.

The Rector was old-fashioned and particular, and she did not want him to think his daughter's friend reckless or overindependent.

"I'm glad of that—very glad. Nathalie and I must claim the privilege of being a little bit anxious about you sometimes. And what about your work, now?"

Lydia had guessed what was coming, and wilfully pretended to misunderstand it.

"I'm writing another book, and the people who published my first one have already asked me about it, so I hope they'll take it."

"Ah, indeed. Well, no doubt they will be only too glad—I hope so, I hope so. But I meant your daily work, my child—the secretaryship."

"I shall begin again next month—as soon as Sir Rupert and Lady Honoret come back from Scotland."

"What are these people like, may I ask?"

"Lady Honoret writes, and knows a great many clever people, and Sir Rupert is in the City—and gives a great deal to charity."

"Does he—does he? But now forgive me, my dear child—are these people altogether desirable—is the tone of their house quite what it should be?"

Lydia, genuinely astonished, could only reply:

"I think so—I don't know—I've never thought about it."

"No, indeed—how should you at your age? But your acquaintance with this lady came about very casually, I understand, and—and—— In short, my dear Lydia, I have lately heard one or two things which disturbed me, and led me to think it my duty to utter a word of warning. Nathalie has so much affection for you, and you have so identified yourself with our

little daily round of life here, that I—I could no more let you go into danger with your eyes shut than I could my own daughter."

The good Rector's voice held emotion, as well as great earnestness, and Lydia said with perfect sincerity:

"It's very kind of you, Mr. Palmer, and I can't be grateful enough. But my post is a very good one, and really and truly the work I do is almost all connected with charities—the hospitals, and institutions and things of which Sir Rupert is patron. He is a very generous man."

"Is that so? There are many most open-handed members of the Jewish community, I know—indeed, many a professed Christian might be put to shame by them. But that brings me to another point. Should you not rather employ your capabilities—your great capabilities—in some service other than that of an alien faith?"

"But Sir Rupert gives to religious objects too," said Lydia quickly. "At least, I mean he makes no distinction between denominations. There is a Roman Catholic hospital on his list, and he has sent money to Mr. Clement Damerel's Church Lads' Brigade, I know, and several other things."

"Yes—yes. Damerel certainly described him as a most generous man."

But the Rector still looked thoroughly uneasy.

"I have no shadow of a right to coerce you in any way, my dear child," he said at last. "But I do implore you to look upon me as a friend, and if at any time you should feel perplexed or doubtful, as to your position with these people, write to me quite freely. Your confidence will always be treated as sacred, and I might

be able to help you. You know," said the Rector wistfully, "there are a great many branches of work in our own Church that would be only too glad of help and brains like yours. I could easily make inquiries as to a secretarial post with the Church Army or the Y.W.C.A. in London."

"I am obliged to think of my salary," said Lydia, not without intention. "My aunt and uncle have done a great deal for me, and it makes a difference to them that I should be able to keep myself comfortably. I get two pounds a week from Sir Rupert Honoret, and my lunch and my tea every day."

"That is good," said the Rector.

And the thought crossed his mind, just as Lydia had intended that it should, and found semi-expression in his murmured words: "Yes—I don't know that the Y.W.C.A. can afford quite that scale of pay. . . ."

On the whole, Lydia, thinking it over afterwards, could not feel the conversation in any way to be regretted. It had established her on the footing almost of an adopted daughter, as regarded the kind old Rector, and Lydia felt that she hardly needed Nathalie's assurance, warmly given on the night before she was to return to London:

"Of course you'll come to us again, Lydia dear, whenever you can get away, won't you? Father does so hope you will—I've never seen him take such a fancy to anyone as he has to you. And you've been so good and dear about helping us, and joining in all our dull ways down here!"

Lydia protested affectionately, and said how much she should love to come and stay with Nathalie again. Only, of course, there was Aunt Beryl to be thought of—and Grandpapa. They must never be allowed to

think that Lydia preferred to spend her holidays elsewhere . . . in fact, if it wasn't that she'd been at Regency Terrace for an unexpected visit after leaving Madame Elena's, she ought to have gone there at least for the last week of this month.

"Of course I quite understand," said Nathalie, "and it's very good of you, Lydia, always to think of them first. Only, you know, a long journey like the one from London here is hardly worth while unless it's for a real, proper visit, is it now?"

Aunt Beryl, oddly enough, had written very much the same, in reply to Lydia's letter, explaining that she would have to go straight back to London when she left Clyst Milton.

So evidently no one's feelings had been hurt, and Lydia could enjoy the Palmers and their comfortable Rectory until the last possible moment quite freely.

She went away at last, able to look back upon her Devonshire month with a delightful feeling of happiness and success. Her friendship with Nathalie was more firmly established now that they had met again, both grown up, and that Nathalie's childish admiration for Lydia had been reinforced—as it was impossible not to know that it had—from its enthusiastic endorsement from Nathalie's father, and from Lydia's own triumphant adaptation of herself to her surroundings.

She had learnt a lot of new things—how one dressed in the country, and wore heavy boots, and went out in all weathers, and climbed backwards out of a dog-cart, and she had made acquaintance with Lady Lucy Damerel, which would silence Miss Forster, once and for all, with her perpetual "Sir Rupert and Lady Honoret."

The recollection of the Honorets gave Lydia the slightest moment's pause. After all, Lady Lucy Dam-

erel seemed never to have heard of them, and all that Lydia had reported of the literary and theatrical society that came to Lexham Gardens, and the great publisher's, Mr. Cassela's constant visits there, had apparently conveyed nothing at all to the people at Quintmere.

But another thought also struck Lydia quite suddenly, and woke in her an amused mingling of resentment and gratification.

Only one person could have spoken to the old Rector of the Honorets in such a fashion as to make him wonder whether, as he had said, the tone of their house was such as to warrant Lydia's spending her days there.

And that person was the Reverend Clement Damerel.

XIX

THE return to London seemed like a return to another life.

Even the weather changed suddenly.

No more waking to the sound of the hens clucking below the open window, to the sight of nodding ivy-leaves, and to the cheerful anticipation of such novelties as a school entertainment in the village, or an all-day cricket match, with luncheon provided for both teams at Quintmere, as well as the usual Saturday afternoon tea at the pavilion.

Fogs began very early, and seemed to pervade the boarding-house, together with the perpetual smell of cabbages cooking in the basement. Omnibuses lurched and rumbled through the wet streets, and the "Elephant and Castle," that took Lydia daily to the corner of Lexham Gardens, seemed always full of shiny mackintoshes and dripping umbrellas.

There was a change in the atmosphere of the household there that Lydia could not altogether define.

For one thing, Sir Rupert's taciturnity seemed to have given place to a spasmodic, unpleasant sort of garrulity, when he would ask his secretary abrupt and apparently disconnected questions, that certainly did not concern her work for him.

"You been in here all day, Miss Raymond?"

"Yes. It was too wet to take my little walk after lunch, I thought."

"Do they bring your lunch properly in here?"

"Yes, thank you."

"You didn't go to the dining-room to-day, then?"

"No, Sir Rupert."

A pause, while Sir Rupert gave his habitual, choked-sounding snort, as though in a useless attempt to modify the ugly nasal intonation with which he always spoke.

"I suppose her Ladyship wasn't in for lunch, was she?"

He always spoke of his wife as "her Ladyship," and Lydia inwardly resented it.

"I don't know."

"She doesn't tell you her plans, eh?"

"I haven't seen Lady Honoret for the last day or two."

"No, I don't suppose you have. She's more often out than in, by all accounts," said Sir Rupert, with a disagreeable, meaningless laugh.

Another day, when he asked Lydia the same question, she was able to reply that Lady Honoret had invited her to luncheon in the dining-room.

"There were some people here, weren't there?"

"Only one or two. There was an old lady whose name I didn't hear, and Mrs. Cohen and Mr. Cassela."

"H'm. And I suppose they stayed on all the afternoon?"

"I don't know," said Lydia. "I came back here at half-past two."

Sir Rupert gave her a very sharp look, almost as though he were wondering whether or not she was speaking the truth, and Lydia felt vexed and uncomfortable, unable to imagine any reason for these interrogations.

Still more disconcerting did she find it when Sir

Rupert took to making sudden appearances in the course of the day, always at hours when he had hitherto been in the City.

"Is her Ladyship in?"

"I don't know, Sir Rupert."

"Just ring the bell, will you?"

And Sir Rupert would sharply question the footman:

"What time did her Ladyship go out?"

"I couldn't say, Sir Rupert. I'll inquire, Sir Rupert."

The footman was always obliged to disappear, in order to collect the information that her Ladyship had gone off in a hansom-cab at half-past two o'clock.

"Didn't she order the carriage?"

"I believe not, Sir Rupert."

"Why not? What do I keep a couple of fine horses for, eating their heads off, and fellows in livery and all? Anything wrong with the horses, eh?"

"Not as I'm aware of, Sir Rupert."

"Send her Ladyship's maid to me. No—don't—that'll do. You can go."

"Very good, Sir Rupert."

Then the little Jewish financier turned to Lydia, pretending to be absorbed at her writing-table in the corner.

"Why don't her Ladyship use the carriage, instead of a low, dirty cab?"

"I don't know at all. Perhaps Lady Honoret went out in a hurry."

Sir Rupert snorted again.

Perhaps, after all, old Mr. Palmer's warnings had not been without reason. Lydia began to feel that she did not much like the atmosphere of the Lexham Gardens house nowadays.

Her relations with Lady Honoret were changed, too. The excitement that the publication of her book had momentarily caused in these literary circles was now apparently forgotten, and although Lydia resolutely told herself that she had expected nothing less, she could not help noticing that instead of being introduced to visitors as the new discov'ey, she was now either left unpresented, or referred to as "my husband's secreta'y, who does sums so ve'y, ve'y marvellously. Poor little *me* can never add two and two together, you know. . . ."

Sometimes Lady Honoret brought a request to Lydia that she would juggle various items of expenditure on dress or jewellery into an appearance of charitable generosity, but this she only did in her own drawing-room. She never, so far as Lydia was aware, entered Sir Rupert's study, whether he were there or not.

Clement Damerel did not come to Lexham Gardens for some time after Lydia's return there, and when at last he did so, it was by appointment, and Sir Rupert was waiting for him. Lydia was not at all sure what the etiquette of her position demanded, but Mr. Damerel appeared to have no such doubts.

He shook hands with her, although flushing a little, and told Sir Rupert that Miss Raymond had spent her holiday with his next-door neighbours in Devonshire.

Sir Rupert expressed no interest in the coincidence, and the two men began at once to discuss business.

Sir Rupert, however, did not seem quite so much interested in East End crèches and orphan asylums as he had been in the summer.

Very often the instructions that he gave Lydia were self-contradictory, as though he hardly knew altogether what he was saying.

It came as a relief to Lydia when one day he told her that an old friend of his was coming to stay.

"A man I knew abroad," said Sir Rupert gruffly. "Quite a rough diamond, you understand, and I don't want him to bother her Ladyship. He'll make this room his headquarters."

"I'm afraid I may be in his way?" ventured Lydia.

"No. He's got plenty of writing to do. Over here on business."

Lydia pictured a Colonial, but Sir Rupert's friend proved to be a very quiet, unmistakably English, middle-aged man, who talked a good deal about big-game shooting in Africa, and was more prolix of reminiscences than was his host.

Sir Rupert, indeed, rather shocked Lydia by his absence of cordiality towards his old friend. He did not interrupt his daily excursions to the City on Mr. Codd's account, and, in fact, appeared rather to discontinue his recently acquired habit of making unexpectedly early returns.

Mr. Codd was left to entertain himself all the morning, which he very often did by reading the newspapers in the study, or making entries in a black memorandum book that he kept in his pocket.

"As an old traveller, I may be writing my reminiscences one of these days," he jokingly observed to Lydia. "I've always kept up the habit of noting my impressions as I go along. You'll find that a very useful thing to do, Miss Raymond, as you write yourself."

Lydia felt gratified.

"How do you know that I write?" she asked rather shyly.

"I've not yet had the pleasure of reading your novel,

but Lady Honoret has told me all about it, and the success it enjoys."

So Lady Honoret, at least, did take a little trouble to entertain the neglected guest!

Lydia felt quite relieved. Mr. Codd was very nice, and had quite good manners, but she had somehow imagined that he did not see very much of his hostess.

Certainly he must lunch in her company, but Lydia had a vague idea that he generally went out by himself in the afternoons. And she was obliged to admit, with a certain inward appreciation for her own discernment, that Mr. Codd, evidently a practical, matter-of-fact man, whose chief idea was sport, and whose life had been passed largely in the wilds, could hardly have very much in common with cultivated, expensive little Lady Honoret and her artistic circle of friends.

From these considerations it was easy to pass to a friendly feeling, almost amounting to a sense of responsibility, for Mr. Codd's unoccupied morning hours.

Lydia was not very busy, and Mr. Codd was always ready to talk. For all his quietness of manner, he was a gregarious soul. Lydia had once entered the study, after a protracted absence, and found him in friendly intercourse with William, the footman.

Quite evidently, Mr. Codd was lonely.

Lydia asked him one or two questions about his travels and he gave her some very interesting information, in a manner that somehow reminded her a little of Uncle George, and then, in return as it were for her interest in his concerns, Mr. Codd asked Lydia about her own work.

Had she been long with his old friend Sir Rupert?

Lydia explained that she had not.

Mr. Codd said that Sir Rupert might be a little

taciturn, perhaps, but that was only manner—a heart of gold. In fact, a rough diamond, Mr. Codd called him, oddly selecting the very expression by which Sir Rupert had described *him*, before his arrival.

"Our little friend, Lady Honoret, now," said Mr. Codd, smiling, "is quite different—most warm-hearted and enthusiastic."

Lydia assented, explaining that to Lady Honoret's kindness she really owed her present position, and the success of her novel.

"Just like her!" Mr. Codd declared enthusiastically. "But still; we mustn't forget that it gives her real pleasure to discover genuine new talent, and, besides, no doubt you've done many little things to help her—perhaps almost as a daughter might have done?"

Lydia could not help liking the expression, although she knew that it overstated the case. Almost as a daughter! Where were Miss Forster's pretensions now?

"Oh, I've not had the chance of doing much," she said modestly, "though of course I'd like to."

But she added, lest Mr. Codd should suppose her inability to be of use to Lady Honoret greater than it really was:

"Of course, I've always been very fond of figures, and I can do accounts easily. Sometimes I've helped Lady Honoret that way."

"Very rare to find a young lady who is really good at accounts," said Mr. Codd respectfully, almost as Mr. Monteagle Almond might have spoken. "Quite a faculty apart. I suppose you've mastered accountancy pretty thoroughly?"

Lydia told him, while he listened with great interest

and attention, of her experience at Madame Elena's shop.

"Ah, yes! Of course, after that Lady Honoret's straightforward little accounts must seem to you like child's play!"

Lydia laughed a little, secretly amused at the singularly inappropriate adjective that he had selected for describing Lady Honoret's system of dealing with her expenditure, but she did not say anything.

Mr. Codd twirled his grey moustache, and declared that it was a shame to waste her time by talking, but if he might say so, it was a surprising relief to find a young lady who had other ideas in her head than dressing up, or going to the play.

Lydia remembered Margoliouth, but, after all, she thought that she had changed a great deal since those days. In fact, she must have done so, since she could attract men like Mr. Clement Damerel, and even Mr. Codd himself.

The liking that he evinced for her conversation was so unmistakable that Lydia began to allow herself to place possible interpretations upon it.

She was not attracted by Mr. Codd as she was by Clement Damerel, the only man who had yet touched her imagination in any romantic sense. But Mr. Codd —some instinct that she could not doubt assured her of it—belonged, for all his polished manners, and his old friendship with Sir Rupert and his extensive travels, to the classification roughly described by Lydia as her own "sort," although he might be, and probably was, a rich man. Clement Damerel, the young London parson, and certainly not rich at all, was different. He might be attracted by Lydia, but an indefinable gulf

separated the worlds to which they respectively belonged.

It was entirely characteristic of Lydia's eminently practical outlook upon life that she should attach an importance to Mr. Codd's mild attentions which she had absolutely denied to her own perfectly-recognized inclination towards the good-looking, diffident young clergyman.

Mr. Codd's visit continued for a whole fortnight, and appeared likely to extend even beyond it. He explained to Lydia that he had no relations in England now, and but few friends, and so Sir Rupert had kindly bidden him make the house at Lexham Gardens his headquarters.

Perhaps it was because he wished his old friend to feel himself at home that Sir Rupert took so little pains to entertain him, Lydia reflected, but she did not feel that such a consideration would in any way account for the extreme brusqueness of the Jewish financier's manner from time to time.

"Stop that damned foolery!" Lydia overheard him growl, when Mr. Codd had made an innocent and friendly allusion to some adventure shared in the past upon the West Coast of Africa.

Mr. Codd remained smiling and unperturbed, but he said to Lydia soon afterwards that he was afraid the City was a strenuous place, and told upon the nerves of many.

"Our poor friend, now—I daresay you notice a little irritability. Of course, meaningless—he merely lets himself go with those who are quite certain not to misunderstand him—but there's a certain *tension* about him that I don't quite like. It looks to me very much

like over-strained nerves—probably from overwork. I don't like it," said Mr. Codd emphatically.

Lydia did not like it either.

Sir Rupert's nerves, Lady Honoret's flightiness, even Mr. Codd's bland, observant presence, all combined to create an atmosphere of which Lydia became, more and more, uneasily conscious.

She was oddly reminded of the uncomfortable weight hanging in the air, the general sense of electricity, experienced on the sea-shore at home just before the breaking of a heavy thunderstorm.

"Shamrock can smell the thunder about."

Grandpapa had been wont to claim such prescience for his favourite.

Regardless of the inelegance of the simile, Lydia felt inwardly as though she, too, could smell the thunder about.

In a phrase much affected by Aunt Evelyn, she realized that "things were getting on her nerves."

She had less work to do for Sir Rupert than ever before. If he chanced to return early he generally said to her:

"You can leave all that, Miss Raymond. I'll look at the letters—just let me have the room for half an hour or so."

This was Sir Rupert's fashion of intimating that Lydia should leave the study. He himself remained there, fiercely picking at his teeth and emitting that harsh, downward snort.

Mr. Codd remained also, and once, as she left the room, Lydia heard him say very soothingly:

"Well, a few days more will see the end of it. We've got pretty nearly all we want."

That was the very day, Lydia remembered after-

wards, that emerging into the hall, she met Lady Honoret, coming in all alone from some expedition that had left her with a white face and glittering eyes behind the thick veil she was wearing.

"Oh, you startled me!" she said shrilly, at the sudden sight of Lydia. "Is Sir Rupert there?"

"He's just come in. He's in the study with Mr. Codd."

"I don't know what he wants with that awful man," said Lady Honoret pettishly. "He's never had anyone to stay before—though I'm only too, too thankful for anything that'll put him in a good humour. But does this Codd c'eature mean to stay here for ever?"

With the recollection clearly in her mind of the words that she had just overheard, to which she had definitely attached the implication that Mr. Codd's visit was drawing to a term, Lydia nevertheless obeyed some obscure instinct entirely unintelligible to herself, and only answered:

"I don't know."

Afterwards she could not understand why she had done so, and the discomfort, unusual to her, of finding complexities in her own conduct to which she held no clue, added to Lydia's unease.

It was less than two days later that enlightenment came to her.

She arrived at Lexham Gardens as usual, to have the front door opened for her with an instantaneous alacrity that was in itself a hint of deviation from the normal.

Not only William, but two maids were in the hall, hovering about the foot of the stairs with white, excited-looking faces.

Lydia wanted to ask, "What is the matter?" but dis-

liked the idea of questioning the gaping servants, and prepared to go silently upstairs to the study on the first floor.

"Better not go up just yet, miss. if I were you," said William, the footman.

"Why not?" Lydia asked quickly.

"There's her Ladyship in the study with Sir Rupert," hesitated the man.

"Of course I'm going in," said Lydia quietly. Her heart was beating violently with some apprehension that she could not define, but not for worlds would she have taken place amongst the hovering, whispering crew of waiting domestics.

As she reached the first landing the door of the study flew open, and Lady Honoret came out.

Her little dark face was distorted by violent weeping and by an emotion which Lydia, with an abrupt, physical pang, recognized as sheer terror.

She put out her hand involuntarily as Lady Honoret dashed past her, and then turned back with a stifled, hunted exclamation at the sight of the servants below.

"Milady!" gasped a frightened voice from above, and Lydia looked up and saw Lady Honoret's own maid, a smart, ugly little Frenchwoman, halfway down the second flight of stairs.

Lady Honoret stumbled upstairs with a sort of rush, and the woman led her away.

Almost simultaneously Sir Rupert's voice shouted from inside the study:

"*Shut* that door, will you?" and Lydia, finding herself shaking all over, and not knowing what else to do, went into the study and shut the door behind her.

Sir Rupert and Mr. Codd stood side by side on the hearth-rug, the little Jew with a face like parchment

and hands tearing nervously at a silk handkerchief, and Mr. Codd suave and imperturbable.

At the sight of Lydia, however, he came forward and pulled a chair towards her.

"Sit down," he said benevolently. "You saw . . . ? It's been a shock, of course."

"But what *is* it?" Lydia wailed, feeling bewildered.

"What is it?" sneered Sir Rupert. "I suppose you haven't been in my lady's counsels all the time, helping her to deceive me with her accounts, and what all, have you?"

The room reeled round Lydia, and she heard as from an immense distance the remonstrating voice of Mr. Codd:

"Sir Rupert! I have already assured you——"

Could all this be about the accounts, and the money Lady Honoret had spent? Lydia asked herself wildly.

"Be quiet, you fellow!" Sir Rupert was bellowing at Mr. Codd. "You've done *your* part. I don't want to hear any more from you."

"I make allowances, Sir Rupert," said Mr. Codd with dignity, "for the shock you have sustained. But really—your manner to this young lady, to say nothing of myself——"

Sir Rupert drew a shaking hand across his face.

He said nothing, but his habitual, sudden snort seemed designed to express a return to calm.

Mr. Codd turned to Lydia.

"Sir Rupert will hardly require you to-day. This has come as a complete blow to you, I see."

"But what *is* it?" Lydia asked again.

Mr. Codd glanced at the financier, as though the words served to corroborate some statement of his own.

"Miss Raymond, have you had no idea of what has been going on in this house?" Sir Rupert demanded suddenly.

"I don't understand," Lydia said blankly.

"Do you know why Mr. Codd is here?"

"You asked him to stay."

"Asked him to stay! What do you suppose I asked him for?"

Mr. Codd interposed again.

"I assure you, Sir Rupert, that no one in this house has had the faintest idea of the purpose for which I have been here—yourself excepted. Secrecy was essential to our scheme, and this young lady was completely duped. It would be strange indeed," said Mr. Codd, with a slight, superior laugh, "if a private inquiry agent of my experience were to betray himself like a mere tyro."

A private inquiry agent. . . .

Lydia had seen in the papers the advertisements of firms offering to supply the services of such. . . .

Mr. Codd, Sir Rupert's old friend, who had hunted big game with him in West Africa, a private inquiry agent—— But, of course, the West African reminiscences were only part of a necessary pose—he wasn't a friend at all, but a paid spy. Then who . . . ?

Wave after wave of sick enlightenment broke over Lydia.

"Has Lady Honoret——" she began, hardly knowing what she said.

"You scarcely understand, even yet," said Mr. Codd compassionately, and yet with an underlying streak of satisfaction in his voice, as though at the entire success of his disguise. "It's like this, Miss Raymond. Sir Rupert here had to find out—to put the matter in a

nutshell—whether he had adequate grounds on which to file a petition for a divorce. He very wisely put the matter into the hands of a most eminent firm, which I have the honour to represent."

Lydia, like many another girl of her age and standing, seldom read a newspaper. She had been taught that "divorce" was a shocking word, not mentioned among decent people. The occasional gossip at the boarding-house, arising from paragraphs in so-called "society papers," constituted the nearest view that she had ever had of the ugly phenomenon.

Shaking all over, she burst into tears that were an actual physical relief.

"Do you mean to tell me that you had no idea at all of her ladyship's little games?" said Sir Rupert, almost threateningly. "I thought you were as thick as thieves."

"No!" cried Lydia, wildly repudiating she knew not what.

"You've seen that dam' fellow Cassela hanging about?"

Lydia nodded her head, barely understanding the implication.

"I told you so, Sir Rupert," Mr. Codd said. "I was certain that Miss Raymond could know nothing. But we shall have plenty of witnesses without her."

The word "witnesses," associated in a vague, muddled way in Lydia's mind with the barely-apprehended horrors of the police court, filled her with panic.

"I don't know anything about it," she gasped, and rose to her feet. "Let me go."

"Not so fast," said Sir Rupert with sudden, renewed suspicion. "How am I to know that you aren't concealing valuable evidence? I tell you, I'm going to see

this thing through if I have to drag the lot of you through the Courts to do it."

Mr. Codd shook his head, and put a fearless hand on the Jew's trembling shoulder.

"Now, now, Sir Rupert. This is most natural, but you're frightening the young lady. When the proper time comes, she will conceal nothing that is necessary for the pursuit of justice—but I assure you that last night's testimony will—will do the trick, in vulgar parlance. We have more than enough evidence to institute proceedings at once, as I have told you already."

Lydia wrenched at the door handle and found herself, she scarcely knew how, out of the room, with its echo of horrible words.

Shaking from head to foot, she went downstairs.

What had happened was no longer incomprehensible to her, but her ignorance inspired her with terrible fears as to the results to herself of the cataclysm.

Could they put her into a witness-box—perhaps try her for having falsified Lady Honoret's accounts?

The innate provincialism in Lydia rose up and turned her almost sick with the thought of a publicity that must shame her so unutterably in the eyes of her relations—Aunt Beryl, the Senthovens, Uncle George, Mr. Monteagle Almond—all of them. Their names rushed to her mind in a chaotic bewilderment of horror.

With a new, sudden pang in the midst of so much that stabbed, Lydia remembered old Mr. Palmer, and his kindly, hesitating inquiries as to the "tone" of the household where Lydia had chosen to work.

After all, then, he had known best!

It seemed to her shaken perceptions almost a natural continuation of the thought that she should hear a voice speaking to her in the hall, connected with all the in-

finitely distant and regretted peace of her Devonshire visit.

"Something has happened—can I do anything?"

She saw Clement Damerel, and realized with distraught, passionate gratitude that the solicitude in his kind, anxious face was for herself.

Crying and sobbing in an abandonment such as she had never known, even in the days of her already self-controlled childhood, Lydia pushed him into the empty drawing-room, out of the way of the prying servants.

"It's frightful—frightful!" she sobbed. "There's been a detective and I never knew, and Sir Rupert is going to divorce Lady Honoret, and he thinks I know about it and can be a witness. Don't let me—take me away—help me, *somehow!*"

"Oh, you poor child!" said Clement Damerel, and he put Lydia into an arm-chair, and knelt down on one knee beside her.

XX

NEVER could Lydia forget the nightmare horror of the hours that followed. The only comfort to be found—but it was a very substantial one—was in Mr. Damerel's kindness—almost tenderness.

It was he who took her away from Lexham Gardens in a cab, and drove with her to the boarding-house, where he saw Miss Nettleship himself, and explained that Miss Raymond had had a great shock, and ought to stay quietly in her own room for a day or two, if it could be managed without too much trouble, and not be worried to talk to anyone.

"That'll be quite all right, I quite understand how it is," Miss Nettleship repeated, certainly without any grounds for the last assertion, but evidently with the kindest intentions, and her hand clasping Lydia's, while her round brown eyes were fixed anxiously upon Mr. Damerel's face.

She was very kind to Lydia, and came and sat with her that evening, and Lydia, completely unnerved, told her the whole story.

Miss Nettleship confined all her comments to pitying ejaculations on Lydia's behalf. Poor dear! how dreadful for her to be mixed up in such a thing—and how *abominable* of that Sir Rupert Honoret to pretend that he thought she knew anything about it! She had been most dignified and brave, Miss Nettleship was sure, while that horrible man was insulting her—and how right to trust that kind, gentleman-like young clergyman and tell him all about it!

Miss Nettleship's championship and her praise of Lydia's discretion made Lydia feel much more composed, if only by presenting to her a new aspect of the case. At first she had only been conscious that she might yet find herself held partly responsible for wicked Lady Honoret's minor peccadilloes at least, and inclined to reproach herself bitterly for not having listened to old Mr. Palmer's advice.

Now she saw that it was possible for her adventure to be viewed as that of an innocent victim, placed in a most difficult and dramatic position through no fault of her own.

In the eyes of Mr. Clement Damerel and Miss Nettleship, she was the heroine of the situation.

Lydia had adjusted herself to this rôle without difficulty when, two days later, Aunt Beryl made an unexpected appearance.

"Maria Nettleship wrote to me, dearie. You mustn't be vexed with her, but she really felt the responsibility too much for her, and that Mr. Damerel the clergyman advised it. You'll come home and have a good rest, now, won't you?"

Lydia could really see no alternative.

Without a salary, it would be Aunt Beryl and Uncle George who would be paying her expenses at the boarding-house, and she realized for the first time that neither from the Honoret establishment, nor from Madame Elena—infuriated at the manner of Lydia's departure from the shop—was she likely to receive a reference that would enable her easily to obtain another post. Moreover, she still felt that it would be almost intolerable to hear the affair at Lexham Gardens discussed, as it must be, by all the boarders.

Lydia agreed to go back with Aunt Beryl to Regency Terrace.

It was understood that Miss Nettleship would convey to the boarders that recent events had caused Lydia to leave the service of Sir Rupert Honoret with every credit to herself, and that her aunt had taken her home for a much-needed rest.

Clement Damerel came to say good-bye to her at a time when Aunt Beryl, to Lydia's secret relief, was out.

Lydia, much less self-confident than usual, asked nervously whether any further developments had taken place at Lexham Gardens.

"I have seen Mr. Codd again, and he assures me that there is nothing for you to be afraid of. I practically got a definite assurance from him that there would be no question of your name appearing in the case. Of course, he was cautious, as those people must be, I suppose, but I think you can set your mind at rest. In any case, if there *is* any idea of calling you as a witness, he has promised to let me know in good time. And I will do everything—anything—to shield you from anything so painful," said Mr. Damerel with agitation. "I think influence could be brought to bear——"

"Thank you very, very much," said Lydia.

She felt shaken and tired, and almost childishly grateful for his championship.

"Will you let me know how you are, and—and—your plans later on?" asked the young man gently.

"When I know myself, I will write to you," said Lydia rather mournfully. "I feel as though I'd failed —and I did want to do some work, and do credit to

my aunt and uncle and perhaps be of a little help to them."

Clement Damerel would not let her despond.

She had been splendidly brave, and proved herself to be a most efficient worker, and other opportunities would come to her hand. The sense of failure was only a natural reaction after the shock she had undergone. There might—Clement Damerel hesitated—he felt sure there *would* be—opportunities undreamed of for the exercise of her splendid gifts. Might he write to her from time to time? Perhaps he could put work in her way——

Lydia thanked him again, and gave him the Regency Terrace address.

"Good-bye, and let me know if there is anything—*anything*——" said Clement Damerel, and went away after wringing her hand.

As Lydia recovered her poise of mind, she was not unaware of a private wish that he had told her rather more as to what had happened at Lexham Gardens after her summary departure, and taken it less for granted that her only preoccupation was that she should be spared the possibility of an appearance in Court.

After all, it was an exciting affair, and likely to prove notorious to a high degree.

If one *had* to be so closely connected with the scene of action, it seemed foolish not to know more than other people of the steps that had led to the cataclysm.

Lydia came to this point of view by degrees, partly ashamed of herself for so coming, and yet urged on to it by Aunt Evelyn's perfectly shameless absorption in every detail that she could extract from her niece bearing upon the forthcoming scandal.

"The case won't come on for another six months,

I daresay," exclaimed Aunt Evelyn, suddenly become an authority by virtue of her protracted perusal of all that "A Little Bird" had to say in the Society columns of her favourite journals.

"Of course, I quite understand about your not wanting to talk of it, dear—but I'm afraid it'll be one of those regular Society *caws celeb.* that the illustrated papers and all will take hold of. . . ."

Aunt Evelyn proved a perfectly true prophet.

In rather less than six months the Honoret divorce case was figuring in flaunting headlines throughout the Press.

Aunt Evelyn and Olive were again staying at "The Osborne," and the former, at any rate, seemed never to be without a printed sheet fluttering in her hand.

"Fancy, they've got a photograph of the house! I suppose they think it'll interest people, but it seems morbid, too, in a way—doesn't it? Which is the window of the room you worked in, Lydia?"

"It was at the back of the house," said Lydia briefly.

Nevertheless, a sort of fascination brought her to Aunt Evelyn's side, to gaze at the smudged outline of the steps and area railings, which was really all that could be distinguished on the page.

"Just fancy if they got at *you,* Lyd, and wanted your photograph, or something. They might, you know," said Olive. "Wouldn't it be frightful? What would you do?"

"She'd enjoy it very much, my dear—nearly as much as you and your mother," said an unexpected voice in acid falsetto.

They had forgotten that Grandpapa was in the room.

Lydia would have liked to protest indignantly, but for one thing it would have been without any effect upon

Grandpapa, and for another, she had a lurking and most unpleasing conviction that he was speaking the truth.

Quite insensibly, during the monotony of the last five months at Regency Terrace, she had come to depend for her only excitement upon the local importance attaching to her as a first-hand authority upon the prevalent topic of gossip—the big divorce case of the moment.

There were even times when she could have wished for that very contingency that at first had struck such terror to her mind—her own summons as a witness in the case—she hardly cared on which side. In any event, she would make a good witness, she knew—clear-headed, with an excellent memory, and untroubled by nervousness.

But Mr. Damerel had written a great many times to assure her that she need not be afraid of being called, and in his last letter had said how very thankful he was to be able to reassure her once and for all on the point. As things were going, he had been told on good authority that Miss Raymond's testimony would not be required.

Mr. Damerel's congratulations—which he applied to himself almost as freely as to Lydia, so much did he seem to have taken the question to heart—were very pleasant. Lydia liked receiving his letters, written in a small, rather meticulous handwriting, and she even liked the careful inditing of her own replies.

But life seemed to have come to a standstill, and the return to the monotonous Regency Terrace routine, hardly varying from that which had prevailed there in her twelfth year, was depressing to Lydia.

Grandpapa took hardly any notice of her, and had

grown much older. He now sat in silence for hours at a time, only brightening into momentary gleams of his old, elfish humour when Aunt Beryl or Uncle George reported some fresh eccentricity of the irrepressible Shamrock.

He seemed to have forgotten his old predilection for Lydia's society, and though she tried to talk to him and amuse him, it had become much more difficult.

When she gave him an ironical account of Miss Forster's perpetual boasting of her friendship with Sir Rupert and Lady Honoret, Grandpapa remarked crudely:

"She may thank her stars at any rate that she didn't foist herself into the house as their paid dependent."

And when she tried to interest him with an account of all the new activities in which she had taken part during her visit to Devonshire, he replied coldly:

"I can quite believe that you helped your friends in their parish, my dear, until they hadn't a leg to stand upon between them."

Lydia was so much annoyed that she most unwisely inquired, with great indignation in her voice, what Grandpapa meant.

"You're a *situation-snatcher,* Lyddie," said her grandparent solemnly. "That's what you are. You always were, even as a little child. Whatever the situation may be, or whom it may belong to, you'll always manage to snatch the best of it for yourself."

After that, Lydia gave up attempting to revive her old alliance with Grandpapa altogether.

She spent that spring and early summer rather drearily, missing the regular work to which she had become accustomed, and, above all, the many new people she had been meeting.

Her second book proved more difficult to write than had her first, and she worked at it indifferently and without much satisfaction.

Most of her days passed in making clothes that she saw no opportunity of wearing, and in listening to Olive Senthoven's grumbling talk and her short, incessant cough.

Towards the middle of the summer Aunt Evelyn went home, and Olive came to live altogether at Regency Terrace, because the sea air was supposed to be good for her chest.

Otherwise the monotony of the days remained unbroken.

The greatest surprise of Lydia's whole life was the proposal of marriage that she received at the end of that uneventful summer from Clement Damerel.

She had not seen him since the *débâcle* at Lexham Gardens, and although his letters were frequent, she had come to look upon them as mere impersonal expressions of the interest taken by a clergyman in someone whom he had befriended at a trying crisis. Otherwise, Lydia had argued, he would have suggested coming to see her, or even that she should go up to London for the day and meet him for lunch or tea.

But when the Honoret case was over, and Sir Rupert had been granted his decree, Mr. Clement Damerel really had nothing further to write about, and Lydia was not surprised to receive from him a very brief note saying that he was going to Devonshire for a week to see his mother.

Lydia wished languidly that Nathalie Palmer would invite her to the Rectory, and felt a momentary gleam

of hope when she received a letter with the Ashlew postmark.

Her eyes widened as she read:

"Mr. Damerel is at Quintmere, and the other day I went up for tennis. We talked a lot about you, and he seemed so frightfully sorry for you about that dreadful Lady Honoret, and said you had behaved splendidly. I think he likes you awfully, Lydia, and I'm sure he's been talking about you to Lady Lucy, because she asked me a whole lot about you afterwards, and seemed so interested. Of course I told her heaps of nice things, and she said Mrs. Damerel had read your book, and liked it, but she never reads novels herself.

"Father went up to Quintmere yesterday and was there ages, but he didn't tell me what it was about, only he was frightfully absent-minded all the evening, and after supper (though we hadn't *mentioned* your name) he suddenly said: 'How old did you say little Lydia was, my dear?' So I can't help guessing that he and Lady Lucy had been talking about you too! I hope father wouldn't call this letter 'school-girls' gossip'—but I expect he would! so I'll stop."

Lydia had hardly had time to attach all the various implications possible to Nathalie's surprising statements when she received another note from Mr. Damerel. He was coming back to London the next day, and hoped that he might be allowed to see Miss Raymond. Could he run down for the afternoon from town and call upon her? Finally, and significantly, instead of being hers very sincerely, as hitherto, he asked Lydia to believe him, hers ever, Clement Damerel.

Lydia's spirit woke from the lethargy that had crept upon it during that long, dull spell of months at Regency Terrace.

She felt excited, but also perfectly calm and alert.

She decided instantly that she did not want Mr. Damerel at Regency Terrace. Aunt Beryl might be all very well, and Uncle George—but who knew what Grandpapa might elect to say or to do? And Olive was impossible. *No.*

She had no desire to exploit her home-life before Mr. Damerel, who had only seen her as the Palmers' guest at Ashlew Rectory, or else as the quiet, reliable, and self-reliant young secretary at Lexham Gardens. She preferred that their next meeting should take place upon neutral territory.

"Aunt Beryl," said Lydia that evening, "shall you go up to London for the day before the sales are over?"

"Not this time, dear. There's nothing I really want, and Aunt Evelyn is kindly going to see about matching that sewing-silk for me. It was the only thing I had on my mind—such a difficult shade."

Aunt Beryl continued to darn her second-best table-cloth, and Lydia, who was never impetuous, waited quietly.

"If you thought of going up yourself, dear, it would be quite an idea. It would be a little outing for you and Olive, if she's not afraid of the bad air. The Tubes are very stuffy, and the trains are always so crowded nowadays. I'm sure Bob would be too delighted to meet you somewhere for lunch."

Lydia was quite sure of it too, and equally certain that she should not avail herself of Bob's escort.

"Mr. Damerel wants to see me, I think. I don't know what it's about—he may have another post in view for me, perhaps. Anyway, I think perhaps, if it isn't unkind, I'd rather go up without Olive. You know what she's like about things, auntie."

"Certainly, she's one for getting ideas into her head is Olive," Aunt Beryl admitted thoughtfully, sucking a piece of thread. "But is it all right, dear, you going up alone like this? He's quite a young man, isn't he? —though I suppose it's all right as he's a clergyman."

"Of course," said Lydia energetically. "I shall simply go up by the ten o'clock train, and do a little shopping—better take advantage of the sales as they *are* on, after all—and then probably see him after lunch, and find out what he wants to say, and come back quite early. It's just business."

"Well, that seems all right," Aunt Beryl doubtfully agreed. "I suppose as he's a parson he wouldn't have asked you to come without it was necessary."

Lydia forbore to explain that this was not what Mr. Damerel had asked her to do, because it was exactly what she had hoped that Aunt Beryl would think.

She wrote a business-like note to Mr. Damerel, explaining that she should be in London on the following Monday, and offering to make an appointment with him at any time and place convenient to himself.

In answer, Damerel telegraphed that he would meet her train.

Lydia considered it fortunate that she encountered the telegraph boy on the very threshold, and received her missive direct. Otherwise she would certainly have had to explain the contents to the household, for telegrams were not common at Regency Terrace.

She told herself that it would be very foolish and a great pity to let her relatives attach significance to small events which, after all, did not in any way concern themselves, but she was all the time aware of a certain excitement growing within her.

When Monday morning came, and she stepped into

the train, Lydia felt that infinite possibilities might lie ahead of her.

When Clement Damerel, after greeting her eagerly at the station, asked whether he might take her to lunch at the house of an uncle and aunt—"my mother's unmarried brother and sister"—who would be delighted to make her acquaintance, she felt a shock of astonishment. He could not have much to say to her if he thus deliberately avoided a *tête-à-tête,* when he could so easily have suggested a Lyons' restaurant or a quiet tea-shop!

Lydia accepted the invitation, but said that she had shopping to do, and would find her own way to Eaton Place later on.

She was never afterwards able to recapitulate her impressions of that visit. She knew that the aunt seemed old and kind, and very like Lady Lucy, and that a still older uncle sat at the head of the table, and had to be shouted at before he could hear anything at all, and that the courses were much plainer and less numerous than those that had figured at Lady Honoret's luncheon-parties. She also felt, rather than knew, that Clement Damerel was nervous, and this perception, together with a subconscious preoccupation as to the reason for his nervousness, made her feel more shy than was usual with her.

When the uncle and aunt drifted away after lunch was over, the old lady saying kindly that she knew Clement would like to show Miss Raymond the pictures in the library, her head was almost swimming, and she felt absolutely frightened lest she should be about to faint.

The revulsion of feeling when she actually heard his gentle voice speaking to her, and knew that she had

been right and that he was asking her to be his wife, came to her as a positive relief from an almost unendurable physical tension.

Much as she would afterwards have liked to recall every word of their conversation in the library, where they spent almost the whole of that afternoon uninterrupted, Lydia could never do so.

The utmost that she was able to recapture was her own sense of bewilderment, that was not yet merged in triumphant realization, and the sense of Clement Damerel's extreme gentleness and consideration for her. He would not even ask her for an immediate answer.

"I know it can't be with you as it is with me, dearest —the first moment I saw you, I knew I'd found my ideal."

That at least Lydia could remember.

And again:

"You must think it over—not only whether you can care for me a little bit, but whether you can face the life of a dull country parson's wife—that's what it'll end in, Lydia. When dear old Palmer retires, my mother wants me to come home, and there's work enough even there—besides, I must think of her—she's growing old, and my brother's death was a fearful blow. . . .

"Lydia, I should never have had the courage to think of this, I don't suppose, if I hadn't seen you first at work—not afraid to take up employment for the sake of your own independence, and the people who'd taken care of your childhood——"

Lydia listened to him almost as though she were in a dream.

"I don't think I'm good enough," she once faltered, and the ardour of his protestations startled her afresh.

"But I never knew—never guessed for a minute that you felt like that." She found herself voicing the amazement that possessed her.

"Didn't you?" said Damerel wistfully. "Sometimes I thought you couldn't help guessing—but it wouldn't have been fair to say anything while you were so much upset about that horrible affair of the Honorets—and then—well, Lydia—you'll let me call you that, won't you?—it's such a dear little name—I'll be honest with you, and tell you that I couldn't have helped coming to see you, at least—if my dear old mother hadn't implored me to keep right away for a time, and make perfectly certain of my own feelings. She guessed, of course—that time last summer when you were with the Palmers—but she's old-fashioned, and though *of course* she couldn't help seeing how—how wonderful you are in every way—one has to make allowances for the novelty—to people of her generation—of one's wanting to marry anybody who isn't either a more or less distant connection, or else Devonshire born and bred! You do understand . . . ?"

Lydia understood very little. She gathered a vague impression that Lady Lucy was surprised, perhaps even distressed, at her son's choice, but that she would make no opposition to it, and Clement Damerel repeated again and again that his mother had only to know Lydia rather better in order to love her.

"Dear old Palmer went up and talked to her last week—I asked him to—and he couldn't say enough of your cleverness, and the wonderful way in which you'd helped them in the parish down there, just as though you'd been born to it. It did make me hope, Lydia, that perhaps, after all, you wouldn't mind a lifetime of that sort of work. . . ."

Clement Damerel said a very great deal more, but he would not press Lydia for a definite promise, and she was slightly relieved not to find herself bound, although the conviction was growing within her that she meant all the time, as soon as the first shock of surprise had left her, to accept his devotion proudly and joyfully.

It was like nothing that she had ever experienced or imagined, and though the response invoked in her by his ardour was more in the nature of mental appreciation for his methods than anything else, she felt an increasing satisfaction glowing within her.

Still as though she were in a dream, she rose when the old aunt—with a great deal of preliminary rattling at the door—came in, and obeyed her gentle bidding to come upstairs for a cup of tea before going to the station.

It was only afterwards that she became aware of having noted, with surprised approval, her hostess's total lack of any apparent curiosity as to the result of the long conference in the library.

Certainly, Aunt Evelyn's eyes, to say nothing of Olive's, would almost have been starting from their heads with sheer eagerness to hear what had happened!

Even Aunt Beryl was not above the extremely transparent device of having come to meet Lydia at the station on her return, and they had hardly passed the ticket-collector's little barrier before she said: "Well?"

Lydia found it simplest to explain that she was really rather tired, and could she talk it all over with auntie to-morrow?

"It?"

Well, yes—Mr. Damerel had really had something

special to say to her, but she didn't feel able to talk about it yet—she must have time to think things over.

By a final inspiration, Lydia suggested that Aunt Beryl should be really kind, and prevent Olive from bombarding her with questions as to the way in which her day had been spent, thus successfully precluding the very obvious possibility of Aunt Beryl's joining in the bombardment herself, as well as propitiating her by the suggestion of an alliance between them.

Whatever else Aunt Beryl might be, she was loyal.

Lydia was able to register a fleeting mental acknowledgment of the fact in the days that followed.

And in the end she actually found herself almost asking counsel of this faithful relative, although she knew inwardly that her mind was already made up, and had been so from the first word of Clement Damerel's proposal.

But it was reassuring to hear Aunt Beryl's outburst of unhesitating satisfaction.

"*Nothing* could be nicer than a clergyman," declared Aunt Beryl, almost as though she supposed her niece to be in need of reassurance as to her suitor's social standing. "And people you knew at the Palmers and all! I must say, Lydia, I always thought you'd settle down early, though Aunt Evelyn didn't agree with me, saying you'd get no opportunities, working, and rubbish of that sort. And, after all, you'll be engaged and married before poor Olive, let alone Beatrice and that scallywag of a young Swaine—I'm afraid he's nothing else. Well, I *am* pleased, dearie!"

"Then you think it will be all right?" Lydia asked eagerly, wondering whether Aunt Beryl had altogether realized the difference between Mr. Damerel and any-

body to whom Beatrice or Olive Senthoven might have aspired.

"Why shouldn't it be all right? You're the very girl for a parson's wife—so energetic and all, and look at the way you enjoyed helping Nathalie Palmer last summer. And if he goes to a country living, as you say, it's just what you'll like—very different to a London curate. Nice for the old lady, too, to have you both settled down next door to her," said Aunt Beryl calmly.

"You mean Lady Lucy? You know she has her daughter-in-law and the little grandson living with her at Quintmere?"

"That's the widow is it, poor thing! It's very nice him being so well connected. Your mother would have been pleased at that, Lydia. Her own people were County, she always said—though I never knew any of them."

That was the way Aunt Beryl looked at it.

The simplicity of her point of view did but little, however, towards counteracting Lydia's annoyance at the way in which the others of her little circle expressed themselves when she was able to announce to them that she was really and definitely engaged to be married quite shortly to Mr. Clement Damerel.

Uncle George, indeed, merely said: "Well, it's a great stroke of luck, my dear, but you deserve it if ever a girl did, and I consider him a lucky young man—even though you *haven't* got a handle to your name!"

Mr. Monteagle Almond was more decorous, though Lydia, self-trained to other standards, hoped that Clement would never hear his grandiloquent references to the Sacred Calling that was all too seldom dignified by the members of our ancient aristocracy.

Aunt Evelyn wrote an excited letter that might almost have been a page from "Burke's Landed Gentry," so many details did it contain as to the family into which her niece was marrying, and Olive, in Lydia's opinion, was quite as "impossible" as she always had been.

"Fancy, you sly thing, going and getting engaged like that before either of us! Whatever *will* Bob say? We always used to chaff him about having a soft corner for you in his heart, you know, Lyd. As for poor old Bee, sticking to her Stanley without a dog's chance of ever being able to marry him—you've put *her* nose out of joint all right! I'm only rotting, you know, ole girl —we're all awfully pleased, I'm sure, that you've done so well for yourself. What's the old lady like, Lyd? Shall you get on with her? Fancy you with a ladyship for your mama-in-law!"

But of all the congratulations that Lydia received—with feelings that were, to say the least of it, mixed—those which disconcerted her most thoroughly came from her grandfather.

"Going to be married to the Reverend Damerel, are you?" said Grandpapa. "And hob-nob with all sorts of fine folk, your aunt tells me. I'm not at all surprised to hear it of you, Lyddie. I quite expected you'd do something of the sort."

Then Grandpapa began to chuckle, and something almost sinister crept into his tone, although he had turned away from Lydia and pretended to be addressing himself to Shamrock.

"What was it we always used to say, little dog—eh? There's no such thing as *can't;* that's it, no such thing as can't."

XXI

LYDIA RAYMOND was Lydia Damerel.

She had been Lydia Damerel for a year—for five years—for ten—it had all slipped by with inconceivable rapidity.

She had been twenty—and married to a young man whose social antecedents were entirely different from her own, who was very much in love with her indeed, and of whom she was both rather fond and very proud.

Her wedding had not been spoilt by Grandpapa's death. On the contrary, it had simplified things very much, and as neither Aunt Beryl nor Uncle George would hear of any postponement, Lydia's marriage had taken place from the Rectory at Ashlew, and Nathalie, and the Damerels themselves, had pitied her greatly for having no relations of her very own at the quiet wedding.

They were sorry about Grandpapa, too, and Lydia told them of his shrewd wisdom, and Clement regretted very much that he had never seen him. Indeed, as things fell out, he saw none of Lydia's relations.

After they were married, they went to live in London for a year, at the end of which it was understood that old Mr. Palmer would retire, and Clement take his place at Ashlew.

Uncle George and Aunt Beryl remained on in the house at Regency Terrace, and because it was too large for them, as Aunt Beryl put it—("But you see, Grandpapa's pension went with him," as Aunt Evelyn mys-

teriously murmured)—they received a paying guest in the person of Mr. Monteagle Almond.

So that it would not have been any easier for Aunt Beryl to leave the house, even for a little while, than it had been in the old days.

The Damerels went down to Quintmere for the birth of Lydia's baby, and arrived just in time to hear the rather sudden announcement of Nathalie Palmer's engagement to the young officer son, home on leave from India, of an Exeter solicitor.

Lady Lucy, who was fond of Nathalie, took a great interest in it all and in the many discussions as to whether Nathalie could marry at once, as Captain Kennedy urged, and go out to India, and, if so, what would become of the old Rector left all alone.

She had never shown greater warmth to her new daughter-in-law than when Lydia suggested, very modestly, that Mr. Palmer should remain at the Rectory and let Clement act as his curate during his lifetime.

"Clement thinks there is more than enough work for one old man and one young and energetic one."

"Indeed, yes. But, my dear—you've only been married a year! Could you really be happy without having your home to yourselves?"

"Nathalie ought to have her chance," said Lydia thoughtfully, "and though she will be so dreadfully missed, I would try and take on her work."

"Dear child, it's very good of you—it *must* be a sacrifice to share your first home, even with the dear old Rector——"

Everyone was very grateful to Lydia.

Good-looking Captain Kennedy wrung her hand, and Nathalie, her eyes still shadowed by the tears she had shed at the thought of letting her Jack go to India

by himself for another three years, could only tell Lydia and Lady Lucy that all her happiness would be owing to them.

"To Lydia, my dear," said old Lady Lucy. "The suggestion was Lydia's."

"Nathalie would never have left me all alone," said the old Rector simply, "and I couldn't have borne to feel that I stood in the way of her happiness. I hope I shall be very little in your way, Lydia, indeed. But it is very good of you, my child."

So Nathalie was married, in haste because there was so much to be done before the young couple must sail for India, and the only shadow cast upon the day was Lydia's absence.

She was ill, and Lady Lucy could only give half her attention to the bride, even at the ceremony, and Clement Damerel none at all. Of the Quintmere people, only little Billy and his nursery governess came to the Rectory for the wedding breakfast, and the governess frightened many people by whispering that Mrs. Clement had been taken ill the day before and that the doctor was anxious about her.

Attention was much divided between this rumour, distracting to many people to whom Mr. Clement's pretty young wife had made herself charming, and the bride herself, full of distress at the news.

Nathalie's last injunction, indeed, was that her father should telegraph news of Lydia.

That night Lydia's daughter was born, and there was no further cause for anxiety.

Lydia had wanted to call her Ivy, but it was easy to see that old Lady Lucy disliked so fanciful a name.

"Now, Mary, my dear—that's the name I should have chosen for my daughter, if I had ever had one.

Or why not some family name—Margaret, or my dear mother's name—Jane—though I know that's out of fashion nowadays. But there's a very pretty substitute —Joan—or I hear that Dorothy and Margery are favourite names nowadays, if you want something a little bit romantic."

Lydia had known too many Dorothys and Margerys at school to think either name in the least romantic, but she said amiably:

"I think Jane is quaint. I could call her Jane."

She was very desirous of pleasing her mother-in-law, and she had wanted a boy so much that it hardly seemed to her to matter what a girl should be called.

"Are you really going to have the baby christened Jane?" said Joyce Damerel in her abrupt fashion. "I think it's very hard on her. She won't like it later on—people always laugh at 'Jane' nowadays—'Plain Jane.'"

Lydia did not like her sister-in-law, although she never said so to anyone, and gave no sign of her dislike. But Joyce's protest turned her half-serious suggestion into a resolution, and the baby was christened "Jane Lucy," to the great contentment of its grandmother.

And Joyce Damerel's prophecy came true.

Later on, Jane did not like being Jane. She disliked it so much, as a determined little grey-eyed thing of nine years old, that she announced an intention of becoming "Jennie."

Lydia, already frightened at certain of her own characteristics reproduced with astonishing vigour in her daughter, combated this on principle. But Joyce Damerel supported her niece, and she and Billy called her "Jennie." The servants said "Miss Jennie" because otherwise they could get no attention from the

little rebel—the villagers took to calling her "Miss Jennie." Everyone called her Jennie, even—most illogically—Lady Lucy.

It was Lydia's first defeat, and took place before Jennie was ten years old.

Lydia had been married nearly twelve years.

She seldom let herself own that marriage had been a disappointment to her.

Indeed, it was only sometimes that she realized it, for her position, her energetic life in the country parish, the liking and respect that she had certainly won for herself from all these people amongst whom she had come as a stranger from another world, all brought her a very real satisfaction and contentment.

Sometimes, however, the change that had crept gradually and almost imperceptibly over her husband, obtruded itself before her notice, and vexed her.

Clement had ceased to make any demands upon her.

Why? It was unjust.

Lydia knew that she had never failed to smile in response to a caress from him, to express interest in anything of which he spoke with enthusiasm, even when her judgment sometimes told her that the enthusiasm was misplaced, or exaggerated, and to take her due share, and sometimes more, of the work to which he gave his life.

Yet it was impossible for her shrewd perceptions, developing yet more as the years went on, to fail in perceiving that her husband mysteriously—unjustly, she could not help feeling—was failing her more and more in spontaneity of intercourse.

"Clement, you never told me the mare had behaved so badly this afternoon. Billy says you came off."

"I was up again in a few seconds—nothing to worry about, dear."

"I wish you'd told me."

"Always let the other people talk about themselves," Clement laughed as he made the quotation, of which Lydia had told him long ago.

"But that's *my* rule!" cried Lydia quickly. "You know I always *do* let the other people talk about themselves—it's a sort of habit now. I don't talk about myself, do I, Clement? Please tell me if I do."

"But you don't, dear."

Why should the quick assurance leave one so vexed and dissatisfied?

Twelve years married.

It had all gone by very quickly. The old, ridiculous boarding-house days seemed like something read of in a book a long while ago, and half forgotten.

Lydia had never seen Miss Nettleship, or any of the boarders, or any of the girls at Madame Elena's, since her hasty departure from London and the house of the Honorets. At first Miss Forster had written to her occasionally—gushing, reminiscent letters, that never failed to hold broad hints of Miss Forster's readiness to be invited down to Devonshire.

Clement had urged Lydia to send for her friends—any of them. Wouldn't she like Rosie Graham, the little pale cashier girl about whom she had told him? or some old school friend from the Regency Terrace days? *Anyone.*

But Lydia explained that none of them had really been friends, and it wasn't at all necessary for them to be invited. Clement, she added to herself, might be nice to everyone—in fact, it was part of his job—but what would old Lady Lucy, conventional and nar-

row-minded, think of some of those old associates, when she had really only just begun to like, and cordially accept, Lydia herself?

So the old associates, who had none of them really been friends, were allowed to disappear altogether from the life of Mrs. Clement Damerel.

She did see her Senthoven relations, after a long interval of years.

Uncle Robert died rather suddenly, and very shortly afterwards Aunt Beryl wrote and told Lydia that Beatrice had married Stanley Swaine, much against her mother's wishes. Bob, taking most of the little capital left by his father, had gone to Canada. Olive and Aunt Evelyn had left Wimbledon and had gone to live at a flat in Earl's Court.

It was there that Lydia, taking nine-year-old Jennie to London in order that a really good dentist might give advice about a plate, met them in the street.

Aunt Evelyn was unaltered, but Lydia would hardly have recognized Olive in the stooping, emaciated woman with a hard-looking flush burnt into either cheek.

"Lyd, ole gurl! I don't believe you've grown a day older—well, married life has suited *you* all right, that's clear! Come and have tea at our little hole—do, now."

"You must, dear. It's years since I've seen you—and dear little Jennie there! Come along—it's quite close."

They went.

The two-roomed flat was tiny and dingy, and perpetually lit by incandescent gas. Olive got the tea ready, and whilst they heard her clattering about in the adjoining room, which apparently served the pur-

poses of double-bedroom and of store-room alike, Aunt Evelyn said anxiously:

"She's altered a bit, hasn't she, poor girl? It's an awful thing, this tuberculosis—goodness knows how she started it, they were all healthy children enough. It's the Senthoven side, of course. Whatever you do, Lydia, take care of that child there. She looks splendid, and of course living in the proper country must make a difference—but one never knows. Look at me! If anyone had told me that Olive would go the way she has—or Beatrice marry a fellow like that Stanley——"

Poor Aunt Evelyn broke off with tears in her eyes.

"May Jennie go and help with the tea?"

Aunt Evelyn nodded speechlessly, and pointed to the door.

When Jennie had gone, Lydia took her aunt's hand in hers.

"I do feel so sorry—I never knew—Aunt Beryl didn't tell me how bad poor Olive was."

"Oh, Beryl! She's been good to us, I must say, and had Olive there again and again—but one gets used to things, I suppose. I do myself—it was just seeing you unexpectedly like, Lydia, brought things back a bit—and poor Robert and all, and with that dear little child. She's like you in face, only sturdier, isn't she? But you've improved in style, you know, dear. There's no denying," said Aunt Evelyn candidly, "money does make a difference. I never thought we should come to what we have come, Olive and I. You remember that nice house at Wimbledon? This place is dreadful in the summer. It must look puny to you, too, after living in a real house in the country the way you do."

Poor Aunt Evelyn!

Lydia saw the furtive, eager look at the tea-tray

that Olive presently carried in, and noticed a shade of relief sweep across her face. Evidently she had wondered if the resources of the flat would be equal to unexpected visitors.

"Does Jennie like bread-and-jam? That's right, dear —it's good, home-made blackberry, Lydia, it won't hurt her. She can eat right the way through that dish if she likes—sweet things are good for children."

"Jennie is never ill," said Lydia proudly. "Don't you think she looks very strong?"

"My goodness, yes! Aren't her legs sturdy—and she's more colour than ever you had as a child."

"You ought to see pore ole Bee's kiddies," said Olive gloomily.

"How many are there?"

"Three—no, four, isn't it, mater? It's awful, simply —and another one——"

Aunt Evelyn frowned and hushed, looking in the direction of little Jennie, who sat staring at her new relations with big, round eyes.

The visitors did not stay very much longer.

"I'd better not kiss that kiddie, I suppose," said Olive abruptly, and looked at Jennie's plump, freckled face with a sort of angry regretfulness. "My word, she's a big girl for nine years old!"

They knew Jennie's age, and her birthday, and all sorts of things with which it surprised Lydia very much to find them conversant.

Aunt Evelyn even said: "You've never written any more books since the one story, have you?"

"No," said Lydia, "never. You see, I married very soon afterwards, and a clergyman's wife has plenty to do always. I did begin a second book, but I never finished it."

There were other reasons, besides the one alleged, for the non-fulfilment of Lydia's literary ambitions, however.

Nobody at Quintmere had seemed to think it particularly praiseworthy that she should have written and published a successful novel, and Lady Lucy had once owned, in ignorance of Lydia's proximity, to an old-fashioned prejudice against women who "scribbled."

Clement, indeed, was proud of her novel, but he showed no disposition to tag an announcement of its existence on to her name whenever he introduced his friends to her, as Lady Honoret had done. Moreover, Lydia, perhaps more than she was aware, had been influenced by a violent reaction against Lady Honoret and all that her patronage had stood for.

At all events, she wrote no more, and had very soon ceased to regret even the unfinished story begun just before her marriage, when it became clear that all the literature in existence would never, in the eyes of her new relations, count for anything at all beside the physical achievement of having brought into the world a healthy, handsome child, even although of the inferior sex.

She would gladly have repeated her success, but Jennie remained an only child, and, to Lydia's secret jealousy, Joyce Damerel's son Billy accordingly remained the only male representative of the younger generation.

Lydia told Clement of her meeting with the Senthovens. He had never seen them, and Aunt Beryl but seldom, although on the rare occasions upon which Lydia was in London she made a point of taking little Jennie down to Regency Terrace to spend the day there.

"Poor things—I wonder if the girl has a good doctor. Get her down here, Lydia, for a couple of months. Good air and feeding up must make a difference—and couldn't her mother bring her? Then we could all talk things over."

But it appeared that Lydia was nervous on account of Jennie. People said there was no danger, but one never knew; anyhow, she couldn't risk having her in the same house as the child. But she had thought, if Clement agreed—what about a really good sanatorium, and helping with the expense of sending Olive there for as long as the doctor recommended?

Clement did agree, and took a great deal of trouble to arrange for Olive's admission to a big sanatorium not far from London.

"So that her mother can easily go and see her, poor thing."

It was Lydia who went up to London and saw the Senthovens, and begged Aunt Evelyn to let them do this, and soothed Olive's pride, which at first seemed likely to prove an obstacle in the way of the kind plans, by promising her that when she was quite cured and able to earn money for herself, she should repay all the expenses incurred.

"Because we aren't cadgers, like that Stanley Swaine, who's tried to touch every relation he or Beatrice have in the world for money," said Olive, with a flaming face.

"Olive! Don't talk like that, dear," cried Aunt Evelyn, bursting suddenly into tears. "Lydia is a perfect angel, and you don't *know* what it'll be to me to have you in proper surroundings."

Of course Olive gave in, if only for her mother's

sake, and she, too, said that she had never meant to be ungrateful and that Lydia was an angel.

Their acquiescence was a great comfort to Lydia.

Olive went to the sanatorium, and Aunt Evelyn gave up the flat and joined her sister and brother at Regency Terrace.

Aunt Beryl, who never failed to send Lydia a weekly letter, wrote to her:

"Aunt E. can't say enough of your kindness. She was a wee bit hurt, I fancy, after your marriage, at your not seeing more of her and the girls, though I told her, dear, that you were very busy. But everything's quite forgotten now, and the reports from poor Olive v. cheering. Such a lot Aunt E. has to say of Jennie—calls her a splendid child and the picture of health. So glad, dear."

Everyone was glad, and everyone was grateful. It was all most satisfactory, and helped Lydia to master her increased inclination for lying awake at nights and wondering why Clement should have altered so much in the last four or five years; why his reserve should extend to his wife, who only wished to be sympathetic, and how it would be possible to curb that obstinate self-will of Jennie's—little Jennie who was idolized by her father and tacitly upheld by her Aunt Joyce.

Lydia, much vexed, could foresee already that Jennie was to grow up into the kind of girl "who doesn't get on with her mother."

Twelve years married.

"I am a widow," reflected Lydia Damerel, almost with the same secret complacency with which, an intelligent and precocious little girl of twelve years old, she had said to herself: "I am an orphan."

Clement had been seized by the "new" illness, the terrible appendicitis that had caused the postponement of King Edward's Coronation a few years earlier, and after the operation, which the doctors called an entirely successful one, he had only lived forty-eight hours.

Everyone said that Lydia had been wonderful.

She had never left her husband, never broken down; she had shown thought and tenderness in the midst of her racking anxiety, for poor, heartbroken Lady Lucy and for Mr. Palmer, the Rector, very old and shaken.

She had sent Jennie to Quintmere, so that the little girl might have no frightening recollections of that closed door, with the hospital nurse moving swiftly in and out, bringing with her that faint, unforgettable whiff of ether.

Jennie should only remember her father, Lydia told Lady Lucy, steadily, as she had seen him last, the grave, pleasant companion who took her everywhere with him, her hand clasped in his.

Before he died, Clement said to his wife:

"Where's Jennie?"

"At Quintmere. Joyce will look after her, and it was better for her."

"Did she want to go?"

"It was better for her," repeated Lydia inexorably.

One had to think of that—what was best for the child, and for many reasons Lydia would have dreaded Jennie's young, tempestuous presence in the house of death and mourning that the Rectory speedily became.

But when Jennie's father was dead, taken from them all in the midst of his work and strength and usefulness, Lydia had to tell his child of her loss.

"Keep her at Quintmere," she entreated of Joyce

Damerel, "and let her come with you this afternoon and then go back again."

"Don't you want her here with you?" Joyce asked, frankly disapproving.

"I don't want her to get frightened of this house and remember her father in connection with tearfulness and terror. And I don't want childish, noisy grief *here*," said Lydia in a low voice. "My poor little Jennie! I ought to have taught her self-control earlier, perhaps."

But, after all, it did not seem as though Jennie lacked self-control, when her mother, in the shaded drawing-room, told her with gentleness and without tears that she was fatherless.

Lydia herself had broken down and wept violently that day, alone with old Lady Lucy, but she had purposely prepared herself to break the news as colourlessly and unemotionally as possible to Jennie, dreading an outburst of the child's undisciplined grief.

At first she was reassured.

Jennie looked at her mother hard, as though to ascertain that she was not weeping, and then said nothing at all.

"You understand, my darling? God wanted father with Him, and took him away, and we have to be very brave now, and comfort one another."

Then Jennie suddenly said angrily:

"There! I knew father would die! Nurse said not, and was angry with me, but I knew he would, when they said he was ill."

She actually stamped her foot.

"Hush!" said Lydia mechanically.

But inwardly she was infinitely relieved.

Jennie was too young to understand. There would

be no agonized sorrowing, such as she had instinctively dreaded.

Then she saw that a different look, frightened and puzzled, had come over Jennie's round, baby face—babyish, even for nine years old.

"Shan't I ever see him again, mother?"

"Not here. You will when you go to heaven," said Lydia, speaking as though to a much younger child.

"But—but—*I didn't see him to say good-bye to!*"

There was sorrow enough and to spare in the sudden cry. It was as though realization had just come to the tardy, childish mind.

"Poor father! He was far, far too ill. Come here, Jennie."

Lydia held out her arms, although demonstrations were very rare with her, and Jennie herself had never seemed greatly disposed towards any show of outward affection.

She came towards her mother now almost reluctantly, and although she leant against Lydia's shoulder, she did not put her arms round her neck.

"Jennie, you'll be a good child, and remember that we have no one but each other, now?"

"Yes, mama."

Jennie's voice was very low, and Lydia could not see her face, but she felt all at once that the sturdy little body pressed against her was shaking from head to foot.

"Poor little thing!" said Lydia tenderly.

She waited for the storm of tears that should follow, but none came.

"Oh, Jennie, Jennie!" cried Lydia, and herself burst into tears, weakened by many sleepless nights.

"Mama, you did see him to say good-bye to, didn't

you?" whispered Jennie presently. "He wasn't *all alone?*"

"I never left him for an instant. He was holding my hand all the time——"

"Why couldn't *I* see him?" wailed Jennie.

"He was too ill, and you are too little, darling."

There was silence.

Presently Lydia heard the sound of carriage wheels on the drive outside.

"Aunt Joyce is coming to take you back to Quintmere for a little longer, and in a few days I shall come too."

"Can't I stay here, mama?"

"No, darling. It's better for you to be at Quintmere."

"Will Grannie stay here with you still?"

"Yes. Now wait here quietly, while I go out to Aunt Joyce."

Lydia went into the hall, closing the drawing-room door behind her.

"Now, are you quite sure you really want me to take Jennie back, or would she be of any comfort to you here?" said Joyce.

"No, no—it's better for her to go with you. Oh, Joyce, she's too little to realize it—she hasn't even been crying. I'm very, very thankful."

Joyce Damerel raised her brows in a quick, characteristic movement.

"She adored him. I wouldn't count too much on her not realizing, Lydia. Jennie may be slow, but her feelings are terribly violent."

Lydia particularly disliked the suggestion, and inwardly resented the truth in it that she suspected.

"Please take her now, Joyce—if you're ready."

She went into the drawing-room again, and found Jennie sitting on the floor, her eyes dry, but her face strangely white.

The means of self-expression, either physical or mental, available to childhood, are curiously limited to the primitive after all.

"I'm very sorry, mama," said Jennie, in a feeble, bewildered voice. "I don't think I've been eating anything naughty—but I'm almost sure that I'm going to be sick."

XXII

In her heart Lydia never quite forgave Jennie for the three days' illness that followed on her father's death.

It was Joyce Damerel who nursed the child, and expressed to all inquiries her complete conviction that the violence of Jennie's grief at her loss was alone responsible for a physical collapse, unprecedented in her whole healthy childhood.

Poor little girl! People said it so often and with so much wondering compassion, that it almost seemed as though they forgot, or minimized, Lydia's supreme claim to bereavement.

Involuntarily she could not help remembering the resentment that had invaded her long ago, at her own father's death, when she had heard grown-up people say that she was too young to realize her loss, when they had told her that her one thought now must be for her widowed mother.

Jennie's youth was allowed rights that had never been conceded to Lydia's. . . .

With her mother's strength of will and personality, it became more and more evident that Jennie had inherited her father's depths of feeling.

If at nine years old she had been a personage, not an appendage, at seventeen she was a force.

During the years between Lydia battled with her, was aware of ultimate defeat, such as she had never experienced in her life before, and grew to accept as part of herself an inward bitterness such as the

efficient progress of her self-advanced early years had never dreamed of.

Before she had reached the age of forty she felt sometimes as though the endless struggle to dominate Jennie, which she perfectly acknowledged to herself, had worn her out.

Sometimes she remembered words spoken to her long ago by the little pale London girl, who had worked with her in the far-away time at Madame Elena's shop:

"You've never loved anyone. . . . I'm sorry for you when you *do* love . . . you won't know how to set about it. . . . "

She loved Jennie with a sentiment far more poignant than any that she had ever known for Jennie's father. She dimly realized that her love, possessive and tyrannical, was embittering both their lives.

"You ought to send Jennie away from home," said Joyce Damerel once, when Jennie was of schoolgirl age.

"Home" now was a very small house, not more than a few miles away from Quintmere.

"No."

"It might be hard on you, but it would be the best thing for her."

"Joyce, you don't seem to understand. Jennie is all I have, and my one thought in the world now."

"I had to let Billy go, when he was much younger."

"Billy is a boy. Jennie will outgrow this phase of thinking that she can't get on with her own mother."

Lydia said this, but she did not herself altogether believe it.

Old Lady Lucy said that Jennie was only a very young child, and that Lydia took a little self-will and naughtiness far too seriously—but Lady Lucy never

saw Jennie at her worst, when she was violent and rebellious and self-assertive. Only Lydia saw that, and she was beginning to realize that it was only she in whom lay something antagonistic that Jennie apparently found in no one else.

Sometimes Jennie was contented, and easy to live with for months at a time. She loved the country and the country people whom she had known from her babyhood, and she had magnificent health.

Lydia would have liked her to form friendships—such as her own with Nathalie—amongst the contemporary daughters of squires and small landowners. She thought Jennie's independence of these a sign of self-satisfaction, and, unacknowledged to herself, she felt a secret dislike of Jennie's sturdy comradeship with her Cousin Billy, and of her unfailing popularity with Billy's friends.

The world was changing, and the young womanhood of the new century, exemplified in her daughter, failed utterly to commend itself to Lydia.

She had herself formed friendships in Devonshire now, and Nathalie Kennedy and her husband were established not far from Clyst Milton.

Lydia knew that they, and others amongst her own generation, sometimes commented with wonder on Jennie's inability to live at peace with a mother who so earnestly desired to make her happy.

The knowledge soothed her a little sometimes. Jennie, it was only too evident, did not require soothing. She was, except when in one of her undutiful fits of defiance, calmly and arrogantly content.

Sometimes Lydia wished that her only daughter were pretty; sometimes she felt that beauty would have been such an additional asset to Jennie's already overweening

claims on life that it was almost a relief to know her devoid of it.

She was not, except for a healthy complexion marred by tiny freckles, as good-looking as Lydia was even now. Of the square Damerel build, Jennie lacked her mother's grace, and her eyes were grey and very direct-looking, instead of sombre and slightly shadowed, as were Lydia's. Her face was round instead of oval, and her thick hair was as straight as Lydia's own, and of a very much lighter brown.

The only family likeness to be discovered in her, to Lydia's amused vexation, was to a faded old daguerreotype of Grandpapa Raymond as a young man.

"I suppose we're going to the cricket match this afternoon, mama?"

"If you like. Who's playing?"

"Only Ashlew—Married *v.* Single. Billy's going to play."

"Well, we can go down after lunch. Put on a clean frock, please, Jennie, if you have one left."

"I haven't," Jennie said, without any regret in her voice.

Lydia herself wore a crisp black-and-white foulard, and wished that Jennie appeared to be more aware of the contrast presented by her own stained and crumpled blue linen frock, made very short, and with a black patent leather belt, fastened with no attempt at trimness, round Jennie's substantial waist. Her blue straw hat swung from her ungloved hand.

Lydia took in every detail of her daughter's appearance, as she always did, but she made no comment. To "nag" was not only against her principles, but would have given Jennie a definite grievance of which to com-

plain. And she was not altogether averse from letting Lady Lucy and the Kennedys, and Joyce and Billy Damerel, see for themselves to just what lengths Jennie's carelessness of her mother's known wishes would go.

Jennie's arrival, however, was greeted with more enthusiasm than censure, when they reached the little enclosure round the green-painted cricket-pavilion.

"Hullo, Jennie!"

Her Cousin Billy, a fair, handsome boy a few years her senior, called out to her instantly:

"Who do you think's coming here to-night?—and *how* do you think he's coming?"

"Oh! *not* someone by aeroplane?"

"Got it in one! It's *Roland Valentine!*"

Jennie's unrestrained shriek made her elders look round, but whilst Lydia studiously turned her head quickly away again, Lady Lucy said indulgently:

"Billy has been frantic with excitement all day. It seems that this young Canadian flying friend of his really does mean to come over here in his machine. I am really very curious myself—I hope he will arrive without an accident."

"It will be a great event for these parts," placidly said Nathalie Kennedy.

She had lost her colour in India, and had not kept her figure, like Lydia. She sat in the tea enclosure, just where she had made the tea so often as a girl, and watched the young and energetic daughter of the new curate making it now.

"The mania for flying is on the increase. Our boys talk of nothing else," her husband added.

"There may be something in it," Lydia said stiffly. She was really thinking of Jennie's incomprehensible

passion for machinery, about which she was now talking to Billy with an assurance that Lydia found it irritating to listen to.

"Something in it!" echoed Colonel Kennedy. "But the whole future of the world may lie in it! Just think what it would mean if——"

Lydia had often heard the Colonel express his views before, and she did not pay much attention to him now, although she wore her usual air of graceful attentiveness, and kept her eyes intelligently raised to his face.

The cricket match began, and presently the Colonel stopped talking, and Lydia let her eyes stray round the familiar field, remembering that first summer that she had seen it—Sir Rupert Honoret's private secretary, taking a holiday with the kind people at the Rectory.

Lady Lucy's old pony-cart was drawn up in the old place, just under the great elm tree, and further on a group of school children played and shouted, clambering over a pile of heavy wooden hurdles that were stacked together in a heap.

Just as Lydia was looking at them, a very little boy of not more than five years old succeeded in clambering to the summit of the pile, and stool there triumphant, precariously straddling from the top of one hurdle to another.

"He ought not—it isn't safe," flashed through Lydia's mind, and almost at the same moment the outermost hurdle slipped, and half the stack came crashing to the ground, bringing with it the little, climbing boy.

There were screams from the children, loudest of all from the child who lay pinned to the earth by the heavy pieces of wood.

Lydia sprang instinctively to her feet, quicker of

thought, as of movement, than either Nathalie or her husband.

The much abused quality of presence of mind had always been essentially hers.

But she was pushed on one side, as a young, tall figure dashed out from behind the pavilion, and tore with incredible speed across the grass.

By the time the Colonel's long legs had hurriedly reached the group of screaming children, and the men on the pitch had turned round and broken off their game, and the village spectators on the benches had understood that there had been an accident, Jennie's strong arms, unaided, had lifted the weighty hurdles and raised the shrieking child into her lap.

"Where does it hurt, Jackie?"

She was calmly running her hands over the little boy's limbs, with all the air of an expert, as Lydia approached.

"Ow—my *leg!*" Jackie yelled.

His mother, an untidy, slatternly woman, looking terrified, hurried up.

"Oh, Jackie, didn't I tell you, you naughty boy!" she cried, with a white face.

She made no attempt to take the child, but Lydia said sharply:

"Here's Mrs. Madge, Jennie. You'd better give Jackie to her."

Jennie simply shook her head.

"I'm afraid it's his leg. Hush, Jackie, now—the doctor'll be here directly and he'll put you right."

Lydia stepped forward resolutely, quite devoid of any confidence in the handling of broken limbs by her careless, inexperienced child, and subconsciously indig-

nant that this want of confidence did not appear to be shared by the spectators.

"Let someone take him at once, who knows something about children," she said low and scathingly to Jennie, and knelt on the ground beside her.

"Don't touch my—*leg*," roared Jackie, as he saw another unfamiliar pair of hands hovering above him.

"Mrs. Madge, will you take him?" said Lydia clearly.

But Mrs. Madge shrank away.

"Oh—he didn't ought to be touched, Mrs. Damerel—not till doctor comes. He'll be here this instant—he's only just gone off the field. Keep still now, Jackie."

"Don't—touch—my—leg," reiterated the little boy, sobbing more quietly. He lay still on Jennie's lap.

"However did it happen?" said somebody curiously.

Several people began to explain volubly, and most of them appeared to have seen the child's fall, and the astounding rapidity of Jennie's rescue.

"Them heavy hurdles, too! However her did it!" they said admiringly. "You'm pretty strong-like, Miss Jennie."

"I pulled *two* of them off him," said Jennie complacently.

She looked pleased, and proud of herself and her promptitude.

"Here be Dr. West!"

Lydia had to move, to make room for the doctor, who took her place kneeling on the ground beside Jennie, and made his rapid examination of the child lying across her lap.

"Right leg, I'm afraid," Jennie indicated.

The temerity of Jennie, the self-assurance!

Lydia actually felt herself flushing with vexation.

"Keep back," she said to the people round her. "Keep back, and let the child have some air."

She did not want everyone to hear ignorant little Jennie taking it upon herself to bestow information upon Dr. West.

"Quite right," said the doctor. "Now we'd better get him to the surgery, and I'll set it in no time. All right, little chap, all right—mother shall come with you to my house."

His keen eyes sought Mrs. Madge's white, frightened face with professional appraisement.

"Now, then, my dear soul, pull yourself together. Be thankful the boy isn't killed. I'll set his leg at the surgery, and then it's only a step home. We'll see about getting him to Clyst Milton Hospital later. Now, if Lady Lucy Damerel would let us have the pony-cart?"

He looked round inquiringly.

"Of course, of course—anything," said old Lady Lucy tremulously. "Poor little boy, won't it jolt him terribly?"

"Not with a very careful driver, going slowly."

"I'll drive, if you like," said Jennie confidently. "The pony is used to me."

"Be quiet," said Lydia very low. "Stop putting yourself forward like that, Jennie—I'm ashamed of you."

But the fates themselves seemed determined in a conspiracy towards Jennie's uplifting.

While little Jackie was carefully laid on the cushions along the length of one seat in the cart, with his head on his mother's lap, he clung obstinately to a corner of Jennie's dress, and would not let her go.

Without a glance at her mother, but at a nod from

Dr. West, Jennie climbed into the cart and took the reins.

The doctor, walking slowly, led the pony down the field and out into the lane that gave on to the village highway, at the end of which stood the surgery.

Jackie screamed as the pony-cart moved off, and could be heard again, screaming more faintly, at intervals.

"Well done, Jennie!" ejaculated Joyce Damerel.

The players walked back on to the pitch again.

"How she *could* have lifted two of those great things all by herself, I can't imagine," said Lady Lucy. "Surely they must be dreadfully heavy?"

"I should think they are!" the Colonel exclaimed, raising and dropping one as he spoke. "Those children ought never to have been allowed anywhere near them —most dangerous. It's a mercy there weren't half a dozen of them killed. By Jove, little Jennie can run! I never saw anything like the way she covered the ground, while the rest of us stood there like stuck pigs."

Lydia remembered her own instant impulse to dash forward, and the push, that had almost sent her over, as Jennie swept past her. She said nothing, but she saw Nathalie Kennedy's eyes fixed upon her face with a rather puzzled expression.

"We mustn't scold Jennie any more for being a hoyden, after this, must we?" said Nathalie, with rather a doubtful little laugh.

Lydia made no reply, but smiled quietly.

She remained on the cricket-field until the end of the match, wondering all the time what was happening at the surgery, and in what intolerable mood of exaltedness Jennie would return to her that evening.

"Bring our little heroine up to dinner this evening,

my dear," said Lady Lucy graciously. "Billy is most anxious that she should meet his friend with the aeroplane. I will send the carriage at half-past seven."

There was never any question of a pre-engagement at Lydia's cottage.

Just before six o'clock the pony-carriage came back to the cricket-ground, driven by Dr. West himself.

He came straight up to Lady Lucy.

"Poor little fellow, I've set the leg—it's a simple, green-stick fracture, and he ought to get on nicely. There's no need whatever for him to go to hospital."

"Is Nurse Hopkins there?"

"Going to-night. I've seen her, and she's not very busy just now, so she and the eldest Madge girl can manage him nicely."

"Where's Jennie?" Joyce Damerel made the inquiry that was in Lydia's mind.

"She very kindly went home with the little boy, and she asked me to tell you"—the doctor turned courteously to Lydia—"that she would walk home."

"Good girl!" ejaculated Lady Lucy. "But isn't it rather far for her? I hope she didn't strain herself with those dreadful hurdles. Lydia, if she seems tired, you mustn't let her come to-night, though Billy will be disappointed."

"Jennie is very strong, grandmama," said Lydia gently. "I don't think she'll be tired."

Nothing could be less tired-looking than Jennie Damerel, when she walked into her mother's drawing-room less than ten minutes after Lydia's own return.

"Nurse Hopkins has come," she said volubly, "and Jackie's asleep, and it's only a green-stick fracture, and so——"

"Yes, I've seen Dr. West, and he told us just what I suppose you heard him say at the surgery."

Lydia was not going to allow Jennie to impart all this information as though it were her own discovery.

"Are you tired? Grandmama wants us to dine at Quintmere to-night, to meet Billy's friend, but the carriage won't be here till half-past seven. Go and lie down, Jennie, and I'll bring you some tea."

There was a tone of urgency in Lydia's solicitude. If only Jennie would have been a meek and delicate child, allowing her mother to wait upon her, how gladly Lydia would have displayed her unselfish devotion!

"I'm not a bit tired," Jennie declared gaily. "Mama, do you know Dr. West said I was a born nurse and Jackie was *far* quieter with me than with Nurse Hopkins—really he was."

"Before you can talk about being a born nurse, darling," said Lydia tranquilly, "you would have to learn not to drop everything you touch, and break it. I'm afraid I should feel sorry for your patients—especially if you went near them with hands like those."

Jennie burst into an angry laugh, and coloured all over her fresh face, looking down at her dirty hands.

"Surely the doctor knows best," she said defiantly.

"It's not very likely he was in earnest—a little hoyden like you. I was quite ashamed of you this afternoon, pushing roughly past older people, and tearing across the grass like that, to interfere with what you knew nothing about. Everybody was laughing about it afterwards—a little schoolgirl thrusting herself forward, when there were women there who knew all about children before you were born. If it hadn't been that Mrs. Madge is a helpless fool, I should have made you give up Jackie to his mother at once. Now

try and keep quiet and rest a little before we go out this evening."

Lydia picked up a book, and Jennie flounced out of the room, muttering below her breath.

When she had gone Lydia put down the book, of which she had not read a line. She knew that she had been unsympathetic, and yet Jennie's arrogance seemed to her intolerable, and produced in her a greater sense of irritation than anything she had ever known. It was nothing less than necessary to snub her, surely?

Lydia's eyes suddenly filled with tears. She would have liked so much to pet Jennie, and make a baby of her, and know her to be dependent on her mother for everything! She had made many sacrifices for Jennie when Jennie really was a baby, and everybody had acknowledged her devotion to her only child. But Jennie had, from an obstinate, rather inarticulate, and backward child, slowly developed into a self-sufficient, self-assertive girl, asking only to go her own way, and perfectly satisfied with her own crude efficiency.

She did not want beautiful sacrifices to be made by her mother on her behalf. She would have resented them violently.

Lydia was far too clear-sighted not to realize that Jennie had inherited her own strong instinct for impressing her personality upon her surroundings. But, looking back upon her own youth, Lydia felt that nothing was subtle, nothing restrained, about Jennie. She was blatant where Lydia had been astute, boastful where Lydia had dealt in half-implications. Thinking over the perpetual fret of their relations, Lydia felt suddenly tired and hopeless.

She went up to Jennie's room, and inspected her black net evening-frock, the only one that she pos-

sessed, since she was not yet considered to be grown up.

"You really can only wear it this once more, Jennie. Your things never last. I can remodel the whole of the top, though, with some fresh tulle. I'll do it for you to-morrow."

It was always a satisfaction to Lydia to feel herself working for her undutiful daughter.

"Oh, please don't, mama," said Jennie, wriggling. "I do hate people to know that you make my things."

"That is a very ungracious thing to say. Don't you think I can work well enough for you?"

"Mama, you *know* it isn't that! It's a shame to pretend you think I meant that. It's only because it sounds as though you were always working yourself to death for me, and I let you do it—and it isn't true."

XXIII

"He's come!" Billy excitedly told the guests, as he met them in the hall at Quintmere. "Came all the way without a break."

"Where's the flying-machine?" said Jennie, as excitedly.

"In the Four Acres field—I told him most carefully exactly where to land, and he made a glorious descent."

"Oh, why didn't I see it! Can't we go and look at it after dinner?"

"All covered up with tarpaulin and stuff for the night. Two of the men are going to watch it, in turns, all night. Fancy, Jennie, the pilot's here, too—he's having supper in the housekeeper's room!"

The two young things looked at one another with glowing eyes, and Lydia involuntarily smiled in sympathy, incomprehensible to her though their enthusiasm was.

Her smile died away when, to Jennie's agitated whisper at the drawing-room door, "Oh, I feel as if I was being introduced to Royalty!" Billy replied reassuringly, "You needn't be nervous. Grandmama's been telling him about you pulling the hurdles off that kid this afternoon, and he was fearfully interested."

Really, Lady Lucy spoilt both her grandchildren, Lydia reflected. Here was Mr. Roland Valentine treated as an honoured guest, staying in the old house to which so few visitors were ever invited, just because Billy had known him at Oxford, and had gone

mad about his experiments in aviation. He struck Lydia as rather a common young man, good-looking in a bold, well-set-up fashion, and with a faint, unfamiliar twang in his speech.

And grandmama was just as indulgent of Jennie as she was of Billy.

She inquired with solicitude if the girl were tired, or had felt any strain from her exertions, and she recapitulated, with the iteration of old age, the story of Jennie's prowess in the afternoon.

"I wish I'd seen you—it sounds as though you'd been a regular heroine," said Mr. Roland Valentine, rather too familiarly, Lydia thought.

"It wasn't anything. I've *heaps* of muscle."

Jennie thrust out a white, solid forearm, pushing the black net sleeve away from her elbow.

"By Jove!" said Mr. Valentine admiringly.

All through dinner they talked about aeroplanes, and Jennie asked questions that elicited long, technical-sounding replies from Valentine, who kept his eyes fixed upon hers across the table.

"I say, you've been reading all this up," he challenged her at last.

"No, I haven't," cried Jennie, unresentful of the assumption, but eager to display her credentials. "I've been keen on machinery, and especially on flying, for ages—haven't I, Billy?"

"Rather," said Billy heartily.

"*Can't* we go out and look at the machine to-night?"

"It's all covered up—you won't see much."

"I don't care—just the *shape* would be something. Mayn't we, grandmama?"

"If Mr. Valentine will take you," said Lady Lucy placidly. "But why not wait till to-morrow morning?"

"I'm afraid I have to be off good and early," said the young airman. "But I hope you'll all come and see the start."

The naïve egotism of the invitation almost made Lydia laugh.

But she was vaguely glad that Mr. Valentine was to leave next day.

She altered the trend of the conversation by asking him whether he had always lived in America. Something in his intonation, though scarcely to be called an accent, prompted the suggestion.

"I've spent my life in Vancouver, but I don't know the States."

"Vancouver!" cried Jennie. "Oh, mama, perhaps he knows Cousin Bob!"

Jennie did not herself know any of the Senthovens excepting Aunt Evelyn and Olive, and her sense of clan-ship was a continual source of vexation to Lydia, by whom it was not shared in any degree.

"Canada is a large place," she said, laughing a little. "Your Cousin Bob is on Vancouver Island, not on the mainland at all."

"What's Cousin Bob's name, anyway?" said Mr. Valentine encouragingly.

"It's Senthoven, not a bit a common name," said Jennie eagerly. "Oh, do say you know him."

"Well, I'm afraid I just don't—but I tell you what, Miss Damerel, I'll make a point of looking him up as soon as I get back, and telling him he's got a very charming relative in England who's anxious for news of him."

"Nonsense," said Lydia, laughing. "My daughter doesn't even know this cousin. I don't know what this sudden interest in poor Cousin Bob is about, Jennie."

Jennie coloured. For all her schoolgirl forwardness, it was always easy to make her blush, and Lydia was not sorry for it.

"Jennie is just like her father," said Joyce Damerel. "Clement always took an interest in anybody belonging to him, however distant, don't you remember?"

"I've heard heaps about Cousin Bob from Aunt Beryl and Aunt Evelyn, and seen his photograph when he was a little boy," said Jennie, casting an openly resentful glance at Lydia.

The young airman was looking from one to another with unabashed, almost openly amused interest and curiosity.

Joyce Damerel turned the conversation to Mr. Valentine's exploits with his machine, and he dilated upon them with a sort of simplicity that just saved him from blatancy, until the end of dinner.

Then Jennie said, "Oh, may I?" and without waiting for any permission, rushed into the hall in search of the old carriage lantern.

As the expedition started Lydia heard her eager voice begin again:

"But if the shaft of the propeller was at *that* angle——"

"Shall you go with them, my dear?" said Lady Lucy to Lydia. "Do, if you want to, though there is very little to see now. Joyce and I watched the machine come down—a most wonderful sight."

"No, thank you," said Lydia. "Perhaps I shall see the start, and they don't really want anyone with them. They're still talking machinery."

"The young people of to-day are able to dispense with chaperonage," said grandmama calmly. "They are all so impersonal."

"Well," said Joyce Damerel, with the curt, matter-of-factness that Lydia so much disliked, "I shouldn't dispense with it too much in Jennie's case, if I were Lydia, for, to my mind, she's extraordinarily attractive."

Lydia felt an odd mingling of annoyance and gratification.

They sat in the lamp-lit drawing-room, just as they always did at Quintmere after dinner, and the placid routine that Lydia knew so well took its accustomed course.

Coffee was brought in, and Lady Lucy lamented that the careless children had taken Mr. Valentine out before he could have had any.

"Are Solomon's biscuits there, Joyce?"

The old Aberdeen terrier's biscuits were always there, in a little silver box with a chased lid.

"Solly—Solly—come along, then!"

As the small and aged dog shuffled slowly up, an old recollection stirred in Lydia, and she gave a fleeting thought to the memory of Grandpapa's Shamrock.

There had been a great deal of talk about getting rid of the obstreperous Shamrock after Grandpapa's death, but after all Aunt Beryl had kept him, and for weeks he had faithfully shadowed Mr. Monteagle Almond, the solitary paying guest of the Regency Terrace house, and a notorious hater of dogs. Lydia could smile a little at the memory of prim Mr. Monteagle Almond, disgraced in the town where he was so well known, by the antics of his companion, by Shamrock's raids upon perambulators, and butchers' shops and nervous girls on bicycles.

Shamrock's fate at the end had remained uncertain, for, after a severe and much-overdue thrashing at last

bestowed by a righteously incensed Uncle George, the Sealyham had rushed out of the house with every appearance of being still entirely unsubdued, and had never come back again.

"I don't believe that dog could ever die," Aunt Beryl had remarked simply. "Honest to goodness, Lydia, I believe he was possessed."

They had all of them left it at that.

"Poor Solomon is getting very blind, I'm afraid," said Lady Lucy.

She said it every evening.

Joyce Damerel sat, very upright, by the open window, and knitted something silken. She was not a needlewoman, but Lydia knew that she would have thought it waste of time equally to sit unoccupied, or to read a book.

Lydia herself picked up an *Illustrated London News,* and Lady Lucy softly rustled the sheets of the *Times.*

"Have you heard how that poor woman is, at the hospital, Joyce, my dear?"

There was always some poor woman or other to be inquired after.

"Oh, dear, these Suffragettes again!"

That was Lady Lucy's contribution to the agitating problem of the day.

The clock on the mantelpiece chiming ten startled them all in the drowsy silence.

"Where are those children? They must have come in, and gone to the billiard-room."

Then the footman brought in a tray with glasses, and a decanter and syphon, and a large jug of cold water.

"Are the young gentlemen in the billiard-room, Charles?"

"No, my lady, talking with the pilot person."

"And where is Miss Jennie?" said Lydia quickly.

"I don't think Miss Jennie 'as come in from the Four Acres field, madam."

"It's too late for her without a cloak or anything, silly child! I shall go and see," said Joyce Damerel.

She rose with her decisive movement, and left the room.

Lydia was left again to the drowsy silence of the drawing-room and old Lady Lucy.

She knew that Joyce had only gone out because she did not want Jennie to be scolded by her mother for the indiscretion of her escapade. Did they all think her such a tyrant, then? Lydia smiled rather bitterly, realizing vividly at the moment that she did not at all feel herself to be amongst the Olympians, the law-givers, and lookers-on at the game of life.

Rather was she unable to feel her place to be anywhere but in the arena itself, in the very forefront.

But since the tragically early death of Clement, and the evanescence of the momentary lustre of pathos surrounding his widow, it seemed to her that she had been relegated into the background—a background, moreover, that was merely expected to throw into relief other and younger personalities.

Joyce Damerel might accept a place in that background—Lydia herself could not do so.

She felt herself to be far more alive, far more real, than was little Jennie, and it angered her that other people did not seem so to feel her.

The door opened, and Billy came in.

"Hallo, aren't the other two in? I thought they were just behind me. I say, Aunt Lydia, we've a great plan. Can't Jennie stay the night here, so as to see

Valentine start to-morrow morning? He's got to be off early."

Lydia looked at Lady Lucy.

"Delighted to have dear little Jennie," said the old lady placidly. "It really is an opportunity not to be missed, and she has always been so interested in these strange machines. I was struck by her knowledge to-night."

"So was Valentine," said Billy, in an awed voice. "You should have heard them in the field, jawing away. Why, she knew nearly as much about it as he did!"

"Wonderful!" said Lady Lucy. "Ring the bell, my dear boy, and tell them to get the little blue room ready at once."

"And may I have the carriage, grandmama? It's later than usual," said Lydia.

"Certainly, my dear."

"I'll put the child's things together, just for to-night and to-morrow morning, and send them back in the carriage. I won't keep it waiting."

"You are always so thoughtful, my dear," declared Lady Lucy affectionately.

She was very fond of Lydia nowadays.

"Good night, grandmama. If I don't see Jennie, tell her that I shall expect her home in time for lunch to-morrow."

But Lydia did see Jennie.

Joyce Damerel and the young airman, and Jennie herself, were coming into the hall just as she left the drawing-room, politely escorted by Billy.

"Grandmama has suggested that you should stay the night, Jennie, and then you'll be able to see the start to-morrow morning," said Lydia. "Oh—your shoes!"

She looked down in dismay at the satin slippers, soaked with dew.

"They're very old," said Jennie perversely. "I don't suppose it'll hurt them."

"I'm thinking of your catching cold," began Lydia severely, and stooped to feel the damp edges of Jennie's black evening frock.

In her usual ungracious fashion the girl twitched herself away, as she always did at such demonstrations of her mother's solicitude.

Lydia almost involuntarily looked up to see the impression that might be produced by her daughter's ungrateful reception of the maternal thoughtfulness.

Roland Valentine was gazing at Jennie, and there was more than a suspicion of laughter in his bold eyes —laughter that, as Lydia quickly felt, was wholly sympathetic of her youthful ingratitude.

"I fancy you're a pretty strong girl, aren't you? It's rather waste of anxiety to fuss around you, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is, as I'm always telling mama. I've never been ill yet," boasted Jennie.

"I'd rather *be* ill and have done with it, than have to be always thinking of taking care, the way some girls do—and fellows too, if they're mollies," affirmed the airman.

"Or having someone else taking care for one," murmured Jennie under her breath, casting a half-deprecating, half-impudent glance at her mother.

"You ungrateful little cat!" cried Joyce Damerel. But she laughed as she said it, and put her arm round the shoulders of her recalcitrant niece.

Lydia, with an angry, insurgent feeling that they were all against her, compressed her lips slightly and said nothing for a moment.

"Here's the carriage," Billy announced.

"Good night, mama," Jennie murmured, in accents that sounded rather contrite.

She came forward into the restricted circle of light cast by the old-fashioned standard lamp, and Lydia saw that her face was flushed and her eyes shining like stars. An untidy bunch of heavily-scented syringa was thrust into her belt.

The syringa had not come from the Four Acres field, where the aeroplane was. The great, blossom-laden bushes stood at the furthest and darkest end of the lower drive at Quintmere.

Lydia looked at the syringa and glanced at Jennie, but Jennie's gaze remained unembarrassed, only curiously dilated and unusually brilliant.

Lydia could read nothing there.

"Good night, Joyce—good-bye, Mr. Valentine—and *bon voyage.*"

They clustered at the hall-door as Billy ran down the steps and spoke to the old coachman. All the servants at Quintmere were old.

"Lunch-time to-morrow I shall expect you," said Lydia to her daughter. "I am going to put your night things together as soon as I get in, and send them back in the carriage."

The softness vanished in an instant out of Jennie's eyes.

"Do let Susan do it, mama. She'll know quite well what I want. I hate you to tire yourself fussing about my beastly things."

Never had Jennie been quite so outspokenly defiant of Lydia's tenderness. Was it the presence of that rather common young Colonial, with his too-evident

enjoyment of her revolt, that gave such a[illegible]ance to her display of bad taste?

Lydia drew the child towards her, and kissed her with calm decision.

"Don't be a silly little thing. You know I like to do things for you myself—then I know they're properly done. Besides," said Lydia very clearly, "you know very well that I always pack for you."

She got into the carriage as she spoke, but she had seen Jennie flush to a quick, angry scarlet, and although she could not hear what the girl said as she flounced round, it was easy enough to guess.

"Yes, and I *hate* mama to pack for me, and do all that sort of thing!"

Jennie had hated it, and crudely and ungraciously voiced her hatred, ever since her fourteenth year, but she was as naturally unhandy as Lydia was methodical, and had never been encouraged to wait upon herself.

Lydia had always preferred to sacrifice herself, her own time and her own strength. Jennie's few and bungling attempts at doing her own packing, her own mending, her own tidying, had been merely ludicrous. No wonder that every such spasmodic effort, generally undertaken in angry opposition to her mother's toil on her behalf, had merely led to a double share of work falling upon Lydia, patiently repairing the effect of Jennie's blunders far into the night.

But the thought of past justifications did not come to Lydia's help now.

She leant back in the dark corner of the little closed carriage, helpless and puzzled.

What had that impossible youth said to little Jennie under the syringa-bushes in the dark drive—why had they taken that way home—that was no way at all—

from the Four Acres field? It must have been at Jennie's suggestion, for how could Mr. Valentine have known anything about it? How long had they been alone—when had Billy, the foolish boy, left them together?

Roland Valentine was the sort of young man who would take advantage of Jennie's inexperience—her ignorant, youthful daring. Because Jennie was a hoyden, to whom flirting was unknown, because the allurements of her youth differed absolutely from Lydia's own, because she was not pretty, and, most of all, because Lydia thought of her always as a child, and never as a young woman, it had been almost impossible to her ever to believe that Jennie could prove attractive to men.

Joyce Damerel's insistence on the possibility had merely irritated her, but with a mingling of gratification and dismay. She had gradually come to admit the possibility of such a thing when Billy, and actually three or four of Billy's friends, had successively fallen victims to most unmistakable attacks of calf-love for the youthful charms of Jennie between the ages of fourteen and seventeen.

One of them, six months ago, had even proposed marriage to Jennie! And it was not Jennie, but the disconsolate lad himself, who had confided to Lydia Jennie's unflattering reception of the proposal:

"It's awfully nice of you and all that, but don't you think love, and proposing, and all that sort of thing, rather spoils the fun?"

"She's simply a child," the rejected one had informed Lydia, with all the desperate solemnity of twenty. "She doesn't a bit know what love means."

Lydia had agreed, with a sincerity to which a strong

inward sense of relief added force. Jennie was a child still, undeveloped and uncomprehending. It would be her mother's part to shelter and protect her for many years yet.

In this strain Lydia had talked to Jennie's first suitor, oddly reassuring herself at the same time as she impressed upon him the deep intensity of her maternal rôle.

The boy had been very young, and very easily impressed. He had accepted the value of Lydia's maternity just as she had offered it to his uncritical gaze.

Had they been older, and Jennie less obviously untouched by his innocent, clumsy love-making, Lydia could almost have wished them to marry.

Jennie's husband must be a man who would recognize her foolish rebellion against her mother's love for what it was—the ill-regulated ebullitions of a youthfulness that was wholly unfitted for the independence that it craved.

Lydia remembered the secret assent to all Jennie's folly, that had been so obvious in the eager eyes and nodded head of young Valentine, and came back to the disagreeable consideration of the immediate past.

They ought not to have been allowed to go out alone together after dinner, like that. Of course, it had all been an accident—Billy had been stupid and careless of conventional proprieties, and neither Jennie nor her escort were likely to recall him to discretion.

Mr. Roland Valentine was quite obviously the sort of man who would always, in the phrase of Lydia's youth, "take advantage."

She moved uneasily in the dark corner of the carriage as she remembered Jennie's great grey eyes, shining like lamps, and her round, flushed face.

Had the Colonial—Lydia so designated him to herself with contemptuous intent—perhaps even tried to kiss her?

Although Lydia could look back upon episodes in her own youth, unprotected as Jennie's had never been, and feel intimately convinced of her own powers of dealing with any awkward or even dangerous situation, of conducting to a successful issue even such unsavoury incidents as those in which the Greek, Margoliouth, or Mr. Codd, the detective, had figured—it was utterly impossible for her to credit Jennie with the like capabilities. *Jennie* could not take care of herself—little Jennie!

The carriage stopped, and Lydia went up into her daughter's untidy bedroom, and packed a small handbag for the return journey of the brougham to Quintmere.

She did not feel as though she could sleep, and before seeking any rest, she carefully put in order all the tumbled contents in the plain chest of drawers and dressing-table. It partly assuaged her vague sensation of anxiety to be occupied, and partly caused her to feel certain a slight amusement at the thought of Jennie's indignant protests could she have seen her mother at work.

It was all unreasonable enough, too, Lydia reflected dryly, for slatternly little Jennie was only too glad to let Susan, the maid, tidy up after her, and brush and mend her clothes. But when it came to her own mother, Jennie apparently could not brook to be served.

Involuntarily the remembrance flashed across Lydia's mind of the defiant unthankfulness that had found vent in Jennie's exclamation of the previous evening:

"I do hate people to know that you make my

things. . . . It sounds as though you were always working yourself to death for me, and I let you do it—and it isn't true."

Lydia sighed, and went to her own room.

She had long ago grown used to the quiet of the country nights, and it seemed almost like a dream to her now, that, as a girl, she had once worked hard in London, and lived by herself, and counted as friends people who had passed out of her life as completely as though they had never existed. The impermanence of these relations troubled her not at all. Stepping-stones, that was all.

Lydia often felt quite surprised at the fidelity with which Aunt Beryl and Aunt Evelyn and Olive Senthoven kept their claims on her attention alive. Olive had long ago left the sanatorium, reported cured, and certainly not breaking down in health more than once or twice in every few years. She had even, much against Lydia's will, repaid a part of the sum disbursed by the Damerels on her behalf.

She wrote Lydia slangy, uninteresting letters at regular intervals, giving discouraging accounts of Beatrice, with a husband who drank, and an over-large family of unhealthy children, and boasting of her own ability to earn a meagre allowance by means of typewriting.

She seemed to take for granted Lydia's continued interest in her uneventful and uninteresting life of drudgery, in Aunt Evelyn's sciatica and increasing deafness, in the sordid struggles of Beatrice and her indescribable Swaines; even in Bob, who had married a Canadian woman, and wrote that he should never return to England.

Lydia commented politely on these pieces of information, that varied so seldom, and in her replies wrote

in return of the garden, and of the First Prize taken at the Agricultural Show by Jennie's sweet-peas, and of the letter she herself had just received from Aunt Beryl.

The letters of Aunt Beryl came just as regularly, and even more frequently than those of Olive, but they were less difficult to answer. The old associations of childhood made it seem natural enough to write to Regency Terrace, even though one felt no real interest whatever in the deficiencies of successive "girls," and the smashing by them of successive household gods.

". . . That's the last of the green teacups gone, that you'll remember from a long way back, dear, though Grandpapa never would have them used, only unless we'd people, if you recollect."

Lydia might or might not remember the green teacups, but she always responded sympathetically, and it was really no effort to write and tell Aunt Beryl what she and Jennie were doing, while they still met at least once a year, and Aunt Beryl had even been to stay at Lydia's cottage one summer when Lady Lucy and Joyce had been abroad.

But to-night Aunt Beryl seemed almost as remote and unreal as did the strange people whom Lydia had once known at Miss Nettleship's boarding-house. The only living reality was Jennie.

Lydia lay awake in the semi-darkness of the summer night, and thought intently and passionately about her child for a long while.

Clear-thinking as she had been all her life, she could not adjust the focus of her mind to an unbiased vision of herself and Jennie. It was as though, for the first time, a strong personal element governed her life and strangely deflected her powers of judgment.

She waited for Jennie's return the next day with a certain anxiety, desirous of hearing a full account of the previous evening, and of Jennie's walk under the syringa-bushes, but in full possession of the self-control which never allowed her to cross-question her child.

Cross-questioning, indeed, was unnecessary with Jennie, always ready to talk only too freely about her own exploits.

"Miss Jennie should be here for lunch, Susan. You might make castle-puddings—she likes those."

"Yes, ma'am. The eldest Madge boy left a message this morning, ma'am, to say if Miss Jennie would go and see little Jackie, he'd be so pleased. They can't say enough in praise of Miss Jennie, can they, ma'am?"

Susan's homely face beamed with simple pride.

"However she did it, pulling up those heavy hurdles —and they say she handled the little fellow so knowingly, too—Dr. West was praising her up at the Madges like anything, they said."

"I hope Jackie is getting on all right," said Lydia, rather austerely. "I'll go down there this afternoon myself. Miss Jennie isn't very famous for carefulness, —is she, Susan?—and I was rather afraid she might have done more harm than good."

XXIV

"Oh—mama, I quite forgot to tell you before——"

The casual note in Jennie's voice was overdone to an extent that must have awakened suspicion even in a listener far less acute than was Lydia.

"Well?"

"He said he'd like to stop here, just on his way back, next week."

"He—who?"

Lydia did not make this inquiry for the sake of obtaining information. She had no doubt whatever as to the identity of the forthcoming visitor, but Jennie was making her thoroughly uneasy, and she wished to test the grounds for the vexed anxiety that had now been with her for nearly a week.

"Oh, didn't I say?" said Jennie, more elaborately casual than ever, and, picking up the kitten, began to try and make it bite its own tail. "I meant Billy's friend, the one who had the aeroplane."

Lydia's mind automatically registered her daughter's avoidance of Mr. Roland Valentine's name.

"Do you mean he wants to go to Quintmere again? I'm not at all sure that grandmama would care to have him. He's not quite—well, not exactly a gentleman, is he?"

"Oh, Pussy-kitten, you've *scratched* me!" cried Jennie, in tones of reproach. "Not Quintmere, but here. He's going back to London, and he thought of getting out of the train at Clyst Milton Junction and

walking here, and then he could go on by the three-thirty from Ashlew."

"But he could go straight on to Exeter, like anyone else does. What does he want to stop here for?"

"To—to break the journey," suggested Jennie feebly. "He's leaving the aeroplane at Plymouth."

There was a silence, during which the kitten, inwardly approved by Lydia, made its escape.

Deprived of this defence, Jennie lifted a very pink face and faced her mother. There was something at once defiant and childlike in her expression that secretly rather touched Lydia.

"He really wants to see *me,* mama, and I—I didn't think you'd mind, and when he suggested coming, I asked him to have lunch. You always say you like me to have my friends here. Mama, you don't mind, do you?"

"I don't mind anything so long as you're open with me, darling," said Lydia, making use of an unwonted term of endearment. "But I don't know that I altogether understand how you and this youth could have made friends in such a very short time."

"Don't you?" said Jennie vaguely.

She appeared to think that the conversation was ended.

Lydia wished, as she had wished at ever-shortening intervals since Jennie's ninth year, that her daughter would confide in her, appeal to her. The protective instinct surged within her strongly.

"Tell me, Jennie dear—I'll help you as much as I can."

"There isn't anything to tell," said Jennie, in the same vague, unsatisfactory manner. "He'll turn up on Tuesday, I should think."

"Ask Billy to come over, if you like."

"Oh, he'll be gone away by then, don't you remember?" said Jennie quickly.

Lydia said nothing more.

She was conscious of preoccupation during the rest of the week, and noticed for the first time that signs of care were beginning to show in her face, round her eyes and mouth.

Several times she went with Jennie to the Madges' untidy cottage, although the girl made no attempt to conceal the fact that she would have much preferred to make her visits there unaccompanied. Lydia listened with a little, kindly smile to Mrs. Madge's incoherent declarations that Jackie was never so good with anybody as with the young lady, and quietly gave Mrs. Madge several hints from her own experience as to the management of children. She also provided an occasional milk-pudding or custard, and presently shared with her daughter in the voluble, incoherent gratitude of the slovenly woman.

She also said to Jennie that it was a great pity that Jennie's old toys and picture-books had been so maltreated and destroyed by a tomboyish owner that none of them could serve to cheer poor little Jackie's idleness now. There really was so very little to amuse a sick child. Lydia herself went and read stories aloud to the little boy from time to time—a kindness entirely beyond the compass of Jennie, who hated books, mispronounced many of her words in slipshod fashion, and gabbled like a schoolgirl.

"I don't believe I'm good for anything, except perhaps gardening," said Jennie, in cross, resentful accents.

"You would be good for a great deal, if you would

only take pains and let yourself be taught," said Lydia serenely.

She was far from disapproving of this most unwonted mood in her usually self-assertive daughter.

It was quite true that Jennie was in no danger of displaying the efficiency that had been Lydia's at nineteen. She was very clumsy with her fingers, except when dealing with either plants or animals, and although she was not stupid, a certain slowness of development and inability to express herself very often made her appear so. She could neither sew nor write with any facility, nor did she show any signs of having inherited her mother's business aptitude. These deficiencies should have made her very dependent upon Lydia, and the services that Lydia was only too ready to devote to her, but, then, Jennie did not like being served, although she would not take the steps towards learning such independence as might be conceded to a daughter in her mother's house.

Perhaps she had not learnt these things young enough.

A French governess had given her lessons, and had taught her French far superior to the unsatisfactory amount assimilated by Lydia long ago at Miss Glover's school, but French was not in request at Clyst Milton or Ashlew, and Jennie's proficiency was wasted after Mademoiselle left.

She was unmusical, she could not draw. On the rare occasions when Jennie lamented her lack of accomplishments, Lydia consolingly reminded her:

"You have a faculty for arithmetic. It's not often found in women—the mathematical mind—as an old friend of Uncle George's used to tell me when I was a

girl. You've inherited the mathematical mind from me."

Lydia refused to see that the last words always made Jennie scowl furiously.

On Sunday they went to church at Ashlew, and to lunch at Quintmere afterwards, after a fashion that had grown to seem almost immemorial.

Lydia never discussed Jennie with Joyce Damerel, whose trenchant judgments, always abruptly and unhesitatingly spoken, seldom coincided with her own. But she had decided to mention the affair of Mr. Roland Valentine to old Lady Lucy, whom she suspected of appraising the young airman at much the same valuation as she did herself.

Lydia had no definite intention of breaking her old rule, and of talking about herself—but her mother-in-law would hardly fail to notice the unwonted expression of fatigue that worry had given to her face.

The day was an unusually hot one, and the slight fatigue engendered by the walk across the field, and by a lengthy and rather tedious sermon, had not detracted, Lydia felt, from her already strained appearance.

Outside the church Lady Lucy made her usual pause at the twin adjacent stones consecrated to the memory of William and of Clement Damerel, and the older monument to their father.

Joyce never stood beside her there, but Lydia joined her mother-in-law for a few moments.

Lady Lucy spent a briefer time than usual at the graves.

She turned, unfurling her shabby black silk parasol, and Lydia moved away beside her.

"Oh, my dear," said Lady Lucy in distressed accents—and Lydia turned her encircled eyes full upon

her—"have you heard what they seem to be saying in London? Billy is full of it. There is to be war between Germany and France, and they say that England can't honourably keep out of it."

Lydia was confounded.

All through luncheon Lady Lucy would talk of nothing else.

Joyce Damerel was sturdily optimistic, and said that there would be no war. The Germans were too civilized. Billy predicted war in a week—a war that would be ended by the British Navy in three months.

"And the aeroplanes!" cried Jennie. "Oh, Billy, it'll be a chance for the aeroplanes at last."

"Of course," said Billy loftily.

He was very much excited, and was going up to London that night.

They talked about the chances for and against a European war all the afternoon, and Lady Lucy sent Jennie to find maps, and then pored over them tremulously, appealing very often to her grandson.

Billy, the only man present, was uplifted and instructive, and Lydia was rather surprised at the deference which his mother and grandmother accorded to what they apparently considered to be his superior knowledge.

She said to Joyce quietly:

"Why, Billy can't even remember the Boer War. You and I can, of course; but these children, who are so excited—they don't know what war means. *We* do."

Joyce looked at her strangely.

"Don't you understand, Lydia, that if there's a war, it won't be ours?—*it'll be the children's.* Our genera-

tion won't count at all—it's Billy and Jennie that'll count now—the boys of Billy's age."

"England won't go to war," said Lydia sharply.

She intensely disliked to hear the anguished note that had suddenly come into Joyce Damerel's voice, as she looked at her only son.

If England went to war, Joyce would see Billy go away to fight.

Lydia had only a girl—there would be no supreme sacrifice for her to make.

Joyce had said that only the children would count now, but Lydia thought that the mothers and wives who gave of their nearest would be held to count too.

Those who could not go themselves, and who had no one to send, would be the ones that would not count.

The thought roused in Lydia a deep and impassioned resentment, that she did not attempt to analyze.

She put the thought of war from her as far as possible, but Jennie would talk of nothing else, betraying a childish eagerness and excitement that almost made it seem as though she would be disappointed if nothing happened after all.

"Couldn't I go as a Red Cross nurse?" she asked babyishly, and Lydia patiently explained that entire lack of training would make such a thing impossible.

In her heart she thought that, even if Jennie did attend the Red Cross lectures that Nathalie Kennedy was organizing, she was much too young for her services to be accepted in any serious emergency.

But she engaged that both Jennie and herself should attend the classes.

On Tuesday Mr. Roland Valentine came.

"No one will think of anything but this war now," Lydia warned her daughter, not without a certain in-

ward satisfaction in making the prediction. "Very likely Mr. Valentine won't turn up—one can be surprised at nothing, and a young man of that sort might be very useful, with his aeroplane."

"Of course," said Jennie, and her voice held no clue as to whether she were acquiescing in the former or the latter half of her mother's dictum.

Soon after twelve o'clock, however, Lydia made the unwelcome discovery that Jennie was gone out. Gone out, without any hint as to her intentions, and, as Lydia felt no doubt whatever, for the express purpose of meeting Mr. Valentine on his way to the house!

Nothing was to be done, except to await luncheon-time and to hope, in the interests of maidenly discipline, that Jennie would presently return crestfallen without the Canadian.

Just before one o'clock, however, they came in together.

At first Lydia's discouraging prediction to her daughter seemed about to be fulfilled.

They talked only about the war.

Mr. Valentine was decided in his expressions. He believed in a short but terrible war—perhaps three months, perhaps longer. The war would be fought in the air. Not on land and not on sea, although there might be an immense naval battle, in which the German fleet, seeking to invade England, would certainly be crushed.

But everything would really be settled in the air.

He was on his way to London to offer his aeroplane and his own services to the War Office Authorities. He already held a pilot's certificate—they would certainly send him to the Front, with other aeroplanes and other airmen, as soon as an Expeditionary Force was

organized. That, said Mr. Valentine, might take a week, might take a fortnight—impossible to tell. Every hour must count, and no doubt the authorities would act as rapidly as possible.

"Then you think war is certain?"

"Absolutely certain," Roland Valentine declared.

"Oh," said Jennie suddenly, "we can't stay down here, where we hear nothing and know nothing. Mama, we must go to London."

"Can you speak French?" Mr. Valentine abruptly asked Jennie.

"Yes, yes."

"They'll want women in Belgium—nurses, you know."

"I'd go," Jennie said, with shining eyes.

"She has no training, and is too young. I don't suppose they would accept her," said Lydia calmly.

"Dr. West said I was a born nurse!" Jennie cried. "Only the other day he said that. A born nurse!"

And Mr. Roland Valentine—who could know nothing whatever about it—looked across the table, and said with emphasis and conviction:

"I'll bet you are!"

"Will you have some cherry-tart, Mr. Valentine?" said Lydia prosaically. "And some of our Devonshire dish—junket?"

She herself had never taken kindly to the Devonshire junkets, and, disliking stewed fruit, sat with an empty plate before her.

"I'm not going to be alone, surely?" said the Canadian bluntly.

"Oh, no! This is Jennie's favourite pudding—that's why I ordered it," said Lydia, smiling.

"I wish you wouldn't!" burst childishly from Jennie.

"It's horrid to see you eating nothing, while I'm stuffing! Why didn't you order something we *both* like?"

"My dear child!"

Lydia's tone conveyed a half-humorous rebuke for Jennie's exaggerated vehemence.

"Well," said the child pettishly, "I can't bear people to sacrifice themselves for me. It makes one feel beastly. Doesn't it, Mr. Valentine?" she applied to him boldly.

"Why, yes—that is so," agreed the youth heartily. "When my young sister first went out to dances I used to take her, my mother being a bit of an invalid. But the dear old lady would insist on sitting up for us, and heating milk on a spirit-lamp for Dorothy, and truck of that sort."

"Oh!" cried Jennie, glancing at her mother. Roland Valentine glanced at her too, with impudent laughter in his eyes, and yet a hint of apology in his voice.

"Of course, you know, it was kind of rotten for Dorothy. It simply spoilt all her fun for the whole evening."

"But why?" Lydia said. "I should have thought she would have been grateful, I must say."

"But gratitude is such a beastly feeling!" cried young Valentine in candid dismay.

Jennie burst out laughing, half nervously.

"Oh, mama, isn't that what I'm always saying? One would so much rather be a little bit uncomfortable, or tired, or hungry—even a *lot* uncomfortable—than feel that somebody else was just sitting there all the time, sacrificing themselves for one."

Lydia remained silent, almost surprised at the acuteness with which their youthful crudities could vex her.

"I must say," Jennie added to Valentine, as though

she disliked the silence following on her outburst, "I do thoroughly sympathize with your sister. Did your mother always go on sitting up for her?"

"Oh, by Jove, no!" said Valentine cheerfully. "My mother's a dear, really, and we made her understand that really and truly that sort of thing is only a form of self-indulgence. Just keeping herself out of bed for nothing in the world except to make poor Dorothy feel herself the worst kind of selfish pig whenever she went out to a party and came in late. The old lady quite saw it after a bit, and just left the spirit-lamp and the milk and things in the hall, and toddled off to bed herself at ten o'clock or so."

Every word that the bold, self-assured young voice was uttering jarred upon Lydia, and his phraseology, no less than his sentiments, struck her as being in the worst possible taste.

And oh! *how* bad for Jennie to hear!

That was what really perturbed Lydia most.

The spirit that Roland Valentine had epitomized in slangy, spontaneous speech, "gratitude is such a beastly feeling," might have been latent since babyhood in the modern, essentially unsubtle, Jennie; but Lydia knew very well that the very circumstances of her upbringing had precluded the possibility of her child's ever formulating definitely such dicta as those so unsparingly delivered by the young man who sat there calmly eating Lydia's cherry pie and cream and junket.

She decided that they had better not be left alone together after lunch.

"What time would you like me to order the pony-cart, Mr. Valentine? We can easily drive you to the station. I think my daughter told me that you wanted to catch the three-thirty from Ashlew?"

"Thanks very much. I wish I could have stayed around a bit longer—there's quite a good train at six—but everything is so dislocated one daren't risk it, and I must get to London before to-night. Look here, I'll send you a wire to say how things are up there."

"Oh, yes, *do!* Oh, thank you!" said Jennie ardently.

Evidently gratitude was no longer an intolerable sensation when applied to a contemporary, reflected Lydia, not without humour.

A rather strained quarter of an hour ensued in the shade of the small, pleasant garden.

Conversation reverted to the war.

"Has anything been heard of your young cousin, Billy Damerel?"

"His mother may have had a letter this morning."

"I shall see him to-night, I expect. Only son, isn't he?"

"Yes," said Lydia briefly.

"Of course, he'll join the army at once," said Jennie excitedly. "Would they send them out to Belgium immediately, do you suppose?"

"Just as quick as they can get them across, I should imagine."

Silence fell again and Lydia felt both constraint and a certain hostility vibrating in the atmosphere. She had not any doubt now that Jennie, and Jennie's barefaced admirer, resented her presence. But what in Heaven's name could he want to say to the child—they had only met twice!

Lydia did not waste wonder over Jennie's only too evident predilection for common, good-looking Mr. Valentine.

He was that romantic and mysterious being, a flying-man—he might be sent to his death within the next

week—he gazed at Jennie with boldly-admiring blue eyes—and he was young.

That, in Lydia's opinion, was enough for any girl. She could remember that in her own girlhood the few attractions that she had felt had primarily been based upon grounds no more solid. Even her first inclination towards Clement Damerel had been merely an instinctive conviction that here was breeding superior to anything that she had as yet known, and a candid admiration for his good looks.

In common with many women of her nationality, her class, and her passionless temperament, Lydia honestly believed that love should come after marriage if it were to be enduring.

Quite lately, vague suspicions of other and more volcanic forces latent in Jennie had begun to render her uneasy.

"Please, ma'am, Miss Quinch is here, and says you wanted to speak to her, ma'am."

"Oh!" Lydia was momentarily startled. She had quite forgotten her summons to the little village dressmaker.

"I must see her a minute—I'll come, Susan."

Roland Valentine and Jennie had both risen almost before Lydia had stirred from her chair. Jennie was looking down at the ground, but Valentine's face showed an almost blatant triumph, and there was no longer constraint in the air.

"I shan't be a moment," Lydia repeated, and was unable to resist adding: "It's about your new frock, Jennie. You said you wanted Miss Quinch to make it, and I've got the stuff you liked. Do you want to see it?"

"No, thank you, mama—I saw the pattern, I—I'd rather you arranged it all with Miss Quinch."

Lydia's smile was finely ironical as she turned into the house.

Miss Quinch was slow and also talkative, and it took time to dispose of her.

When Lydia came back to the lawn at last she was vexed, but scarcely surprised, to find the encampment of deck-chairs deserted. Exactly what she should have expected—not only from young Valentine's off-hand lack of manners, but from Jennie's schoolgirl love of an escapade.

Lydia looked at her watch.

In less than half an hour's time the pony-cart—in reality a hired jingle from the village that always served them when required—would arrive in order to convey Mr. Valentine to the station.

Not very much could be said or done inside half an hour by two young people who knew one another so slightly, surely, Lydia endeavoured to assure herself, without much conviction. However, it would be altogether too undignified to go in search of them, and might encourage Jennie's foolish and youthful tendency to look upon her mother, in reality her best friend, as an unreasonable tyrant, to be outwitted whenever possible.

Heaven knew, Lydia reflected sadly, she had sympathy enough, and to spare, for Jennie's youth. Had she not striven to shelter and protect and save Jennie as she herself during her girlhood had never been sheltered and protected and saved?

Nor would she refuse to let the child try her own wings some day—though Lydia was conscious that

therein lay the effort, as the thought brought its accustomed pang.

But when Jennie should love and marry, her choice must fall upon such a man as her father had been, such a man as the Damerels had mated with from time immemorial.

Lydia's inward insistence on the point dated from Jennie's birth, and before, and was the stronger in its intensity from her own never-spoken but never-forgotten realization of the strange and intangible gulf that had been crossed when Clement Damerel had married Lydia Raymond.

It was a pity that Jennie and Billy Damerel were first cousins.

A clock struck in the little drawing-room, the chimes audible through the open window, and Lydia looked again at her watch.

In ten minutes the jingle would come.

Was there, or was there not, a faint, occasional murmur of voices somewhere within the house?

It might be Susan and Miss Quinch in the tiny sewing-room that was only an offshoot of the kitchen—or it might be another conversation proceeding from the old school-room upstairs.

But what in the world could they be doing there? Lydia would not look up at the window, knowing, moreover, that a curtain of ivy and climbing roses would probably make it impossible for her to see inside the room even if she did so.

But in another few minutes she went into the house and upstairs to her own room, to put on her hat and gloves preparatory for driving.

If Jennie should resent the enforced chaperonage, as she certainly would, Lydia sincerely regretted it—but

there must be no more *tête-à-têtes* with third-rate young men from Canada. Lydia suspected that there had been too many such already. From her room she heard the jingle's arrival at the front door.

"Jennie!"

Lydia stood on the stairs, her shady mushroom hat already on her head, drawing on a pair of brown gauntlet gloves.

"Jennie!" she called in reasonable and moderate summons.

Susan appeared in the hall below.

"The pony is at the door, ma'am."

"Thank you, Susan. Do you know where Miss Jennie is?"

The door of the old school-room, one flight of stairs higher than that upon which Lydia stood, was wrenched open with an effect of violence.

"I'm here, mama," said Jennie. "Is it time to go?"

"Quite time, if you don't take more than a minute to put on your hat. Is Mr. Valentine there?"

Jennie turned round to the school-room again. In the shaded gloom of the narrow staircase Lydia had been unable, peering upwards, to see her face distinctly.

She wondered if she should go up herself.

"I do hope I haven't kept you waiting," said the voice of Mr. Roland Valentine, suave and yet indescribably casual. "I'm awfully sorry."

He came downstairs two steps at a time.

"You mustn't miss your train," said Lydia coldly.

She walked downstairs, followed by the young man.

"Be quick, Jennie."

Jennie hung over the banisters.

"I don't think I'm coming, mama."

Her voice sounded rather uncertain, and Lydia was for a moment entirely nonplussed.

Was it a childish display of pique provoked by Lydia's intention of accompanying the expedition? Or had Mr. Valentine made some ill-bred demonstrations of admiration that had offended and perhaps frightened Jennie?

Lydia felt a certain relief as the idea crossed her mind. In any event, the point could not be debated now.

"My daughter has a good many little jobs in the garden and the village that take up her time," she said in smiling but purposely formal apology for Jennie's capriciousness.

"It's very good of you to drive me yourself, Mrs. Damerel," said Valentine, and they got into the jingle and Lydia took up the reins.

XXV

LYDIA was not destined ever to forget that expedition to Ashlew Station in the jingle, nor the sense of shock with which she heard Mr. Roland Valentine's first level pronouncement, delivered before they were out of the short, steep approach that led into the lane outside:

"I suppose you've realized, Mrs. Damerel, that I was clean bowled over at very first sight."

So much astonished was Lydia at the rapidity with which had come a crisis that she had as yet barely foreshadowed even to herself that she could only gaze at the young man beside her in silent dismay.

He seemed heated, but not at all discomposed.

"Do you mean—Jennie?" said Lydia at last.

"I do. From the very first minute I saw her," repeated Mr. Valentine emphatically, "I knew that there was the only girl I should ever marry. The only question was whether she'd see it too."

"That is very far from being the only question——" Lydia began severely, but the young man went on unheeding:

"However, it's all right, thank God. You may say that with the country on the eve of the most appalling war that this world has ever seen, it's no moment to think of such things. But, on the other hand, it's every man's instinct to get *what* he can, *while* he can—and the opportunities of the younger generation will be curtailed a bit from now on, I fancy. It's just a case

of cramming into a few weeks—or days maybe—what you older folk have had all your lifetime to enjoy."

Lydia, beyond a sense of indignation at the youth's assumption of his ability to enlighten her knowledge as though she were already outside the full current of life, hardly heard his earnestly spoken speech. She was aware of only one preoccupation.

"You haven't said anything to my daughter yet, surely?"

"Why, yes, Mrs. Damerel. That's the very thing I came down to do, though I don't say I should have had the nerve if it hadn't been for this war-news. But it's every man's duty now, in my opinion, to fix himself up, and the duty of every healthy young woman to help carry on the race. I didn't put it that way to your daughter," Mr. Valentine admitted, "but I guess there wasn't any need for arguments. She and I understand one another, Mrs. Damerel."

"After meeting three times—or is it twice?" said Lydia ironically. "I assure you, Mr. Valentine, that things are not done like that in this country, whatever they may be in Canada. I don't at all understand your having spoken to Jennie, who is a very young and inexperienced girl, without first obtaining my leave to do so; but in any case, you must see that I can't discuss the matter with you until I've spoken to her."

"She thought you might say something like that," observed Valentine thoughtfully.

"What do you mean? Why didn't she speak to me herself, if she had anything to tell me?"

Mr. Valentine looked straight in front of him.

"You see, you've made Jennie a good deal afraid of you, Mrs. Damerel."

The pang of grief and mortification and anger that

shook Lydia from head to foot kept her silent from its very intensity. Her shaking hands gripped one another.

"I saw that, of course, the very first evening I met you together at Quintmere," went on the calmly judicial young voice. "And I've had some talk with Jennie since, you know."

"I can't discuss with you either Jennie or my relations with Jennie, Mr. Valentine. You seem to forget that you are practically a stranger to us both."

The young man turned and looked at her with something that was almost compassion.

"I suppose it must seem that way to you. But I'd like you to realize," he said gently, "that Jennie and I really do mean to get married. Now, don't say anything for a minute or two. Just let me put a few facts before you. I know I must seem almost like an adventurer to you folks down here, tearing about the country on a crazy flying-machine, and talking with what you probably take for an accent. But that isn't so. You ask young Billy Damerel, who brought me down here, anyway. He'll put you on to the track of quite a lot of Oxford people who can tell you about me, and I've a respectable old aunt up there, too, a sister of my dead father's. *She's* all right—born in England, married an Englishman, never left England in her life. Now I'm quite aware that you'll want to ask a lot of questions about me, and I'm willing to answer you, or anyone you may appoint to ask them for you. But time is short, Mrs. Damerel, and may get much shorter. I don't know what they'll do with me up there"—he jerked his thumb in a direction that vaguely indicated London and the War Office—"but I don't suppose, anyway, it'll be so very long before I'm over at the front,

If England won't send me, then France will. And I want to get this business fixed up right away if it can be done."

"But it can't be done, Mr. Valentine."

Lydia rallied the courage that, after all, she had never lacked in all her life. "Even if I, who am Jennie's sole guardian, were to consent to a provisional engagement between you—which would depend entirely on the result of those inquiries which, as you rightly say, must be made—even then I should be doing quite wrong in allowing my child to marry yet. You must remember that I know Jennie through and through. She is quite undeveloped in every way, and even supposing that her first love-affair has taken her fancy, that would be no reason for letting her rush into matrimony before she's ready for it."

"Marriage is nature," said Mr. Valentine bluntly. "Why shouldn't a healthy girl of eighteen be ready for it when she cares for the man who offers it to her? I shouldn't take Jennie to poverty, Mrs. Damerel. Of course, I quite understand that any assertion I make must be verified—and you'll find that's easily done—but I may tell you, right here and now, that I have a small private income, about four hundred a year, left to me by the old man. My mother is not dependent on me, and my sister—there are only the two of us—is married and provided for. And besides that, I have the offer of a job as Chief Assistant Engineer in the experimental department of Messrs. Gledhill and Swan, the big engineering firm in Toronto. This war may scotch that for the time being, but I don't think I should have any difficulty in finding something else of the same sort after the war. And if Jennie didn't like the idea of Canada, I'd be willing to stick to England;

but I think personally she'd love the life out there, and just do fine in it."

"But I thought you wanted to go to Belgium with your aeroplane," Lydia said quickly, as though convicting the young man of idle boasting.

"Why, yes, that's quite right. So I do, and so I mean to. So you see, if Jennie marries me, and then I get a German bullet through me, she'll be left provided for under my will, and probably receive a pension as well, as my widow."

Thus cheerfully did Mr. Valentine dispose of Lydia's challenge.

They drew up before the small station and Lydia fastened the pony's head to the painted white rails after the country fashion.

"I hope the train hasn't gone."

But the train was not even signalled.

"She'll be forty minutes late," said the porter with gloomy importance. "'Tis the same all along the line, Mis' Damerel. Do 'ee sit down in the shade and have patience, now. 'Tis this war, as they say we'm coming to."

Lydia and Mr. Valentine looked at one another.

"That philosopher is just about right, I guess," said the young man. "If you needn't hurry back, we can sit here and finish our talk."

Lydia assented.

She felt that in the first moment of shock she had probably failed to express herself with sufficient decision. Mr. Roland Valentine should return to London under no misapprehension.

"There really is very little more to be said, Mr. Valentine. Apart from everything else, this is not a time for insisting upon one's small personal affairs. If

England really is going into this war, no one knows what may happen. Values will be all turned upside down, and nothing will ever be the same again. Why, the country might even be invaded, as poor Belgium has been. It doesn't bear thinking of . . . you can see for yourself that this is no time to take risks."

"Now, why do you say that? I'm quite sure that you took risks in your time. Why do you grudge Jennie the experience of taking hers?"

The question made Lydia very angry.

"Do you realize that you're adopting a most offensive attitude in speaking as though I was Jennie's enemy—as though I were anything but the best friend she has in the world? You said just now that I'd made her afraid of me. If Jennie has said or implied that to you, then it shows most heartless ingratitude. But I can't believe it. Bitter though it is to me to own it, she and I have not always lived at peace together—but Jennie has never heard a harsh or unkind word from me since she was born."

Lydia could hardly go on speaking for a moment. Her passionate self-justification, made almost as much to herself as to Roland Valentine, was vibrant with intense sincerity.

It seemed to her that she was at last putting into words her own inner knowledge, the knowledge that loyalty to her disloyal child and the old habit of reticence had never before allowed her to formulate.

"Jennie was nine years old when her father died. I was a young woman, but I lived quietly in the country for the child's sake. I devoted myself to her. You understand that I'm not saying this as though I were boasting of it, but your attitude forces me to put the facts before you in so many words. I watched over

her health, I worked for her, mended for her, did everything for her. And now I'm told, by a stranger who hasn't known my child a fortnight, that I've made her afraid of me!"

"Well, that is so." Mr. Valentine's tone was impersonal, although he poked with his stick at the soft red gravel beneath the bench on which they sat, as though he wished to look at that, and not at Lydia.

"Jennie is very young, and perhaps undeveloped, as you say, Mrs. Damerel, but you don't need me to tell you that she has a very strong individuality. And that's just what the trouble is. She's afraid all the time, whether she knows it or not, of your swamping that. Jennie very much resents your working for her, and mending for her, and doing everything for her, the way you say you always have. I guess she feels it just about time she shouldered some responsibility for herself."

"But she's not fitted for it! You don't understand. Jennie can't do the simplest practical thing for herself—she *couldn't* undertake any real responsibility yet."

"Why, she knows that right enough. And, you see, it makes her feel that the sooner she buys her experience and learns, the better. It's just your care and your protection that's she afraid of, Mrs. Damerel. And because she's just a child, and undisciplined, her instincts for asserting her own individuality take an ungracious form, that's all. She hasn't analyzed her own feelings the way I'm analyzing them now, because she isn't the introspective kind. She just feels she's up against it, and doesn't quite know why."

"No, she doesn't," said Lydia bitterly, "and I may add that, in my opinion, neither do you. Do you quite realize, I wonder, Mr. Valentine, the absurdity of this

—that you—a very young man, and practically a stranger to both of us—should be endeavouring to explain to me my own child, whom I've been studying ever since she was born?"

"As to that," said Mr. Valentine, still without heat, "your studying hasn't led to any very great success, if I may point that out. It looks as though the result had only been to make you and Jennie fret one another considerably, and make Jennie think herself a wicked, ungrateful girl, when she's only a perfectly natural one put into a false position. Now in Canada, a girl like Jennie would have been independent, if she'd wanted to be, some time ago. She'd have gone to school, for one thing, and she'd have been helping in the household work for another, and taking her due share of responsibility all the time. That's the privilege as well as the duty, after all, of every human being, isn't it? And she might have taken up school-teaching, or worked as a stenographer or a secretary in some business in the city, and just been home for her vacations. I guess if that had been so over here, she'd have been glad enough to be waited on and made a fuss of when she *did* come back to you in holiday time. But as things are, it just seems as though you were refusing her the natural right of the individual—the right of experience."

"And these are the thanks that I get for sacrificing myself for my child!" cried Lydia, almost involuntarily letting the words break from the sharpest pain that she had ever known.

"Well, it's only another kind of sacrifice that's wanted, that's all," said Mr. Valentine calmly. "If you want to sacrifice yourself some more for Jennie, Mrs. Damerel, it seems to me the way you can do it.

hood, and rush ignorantly and
own wings."

"See here," said the young
isn't going to be alone. Jennie'
don't say much about that side
I feel I've kind of butted in
you'd most likely rather not he
for quite a while—or, at any r
what Jennie has to say. But I'l
band, Mrs. Damerel, as God Al
now."

He bared his head for a mo
reverent simplicity.

"I'm not the romantic sort, a
But I kind of knew right away
meant for one another, and I'v
before, although in Canada we
freedom than boys and girls
know one another pretty intima

Lydia's strained mind turned
already seemed to have become

tine, with a slightly apologetic laugh, "that old house, and the old lady there, and all the old servants that seemed to have grown up there, made me feel like a sort of mushroom sprung up in the night. But Jennie didn't seem part of it altogether—not the way that young Billy does, who'll own it all some day, I suppose. Jennie's outgrown it all, Mrs. Damerel. She's just crying out for the new order of things—and I'm going to see that she gets it."

As though to enhance the effect of ultimatum with which the words were spoken, a sudden stir traversed the sleepy little station. The porter came up again to Lydia..

"Signalled now, Mis' Damerel. She'll be in directly."

Lydia and Roland Valentine both rose.

She looked at him with challenging eyes.

"I shall write to you, Mr. Valentine, when I have heard what Jennie has to say. And don't consider, please, that I can give you any encouragement whatever. The very way in which you have precipitated things shows a want of real respect for my daughter."

"I guess the war isn't going to wait for any of us," said Mr. Valentine. "This card has my address—the club will always find me. But it's only fair to tell you that Jennie has it too, and I'm expecting her to make use of it. I'm sorry things have happened this way, Mrs. Damerel, and I wish I had more time to try and put my view-point before you. But if I can fix things up in London the way I expect, and get leave to come down and fetch my machine away from Plymouth, you'll be seeing me around again very shortly. Meanwhile, good-bye and thank you."

The train came in to the station, and Mr. Valentine,

unhampered by luggage, gravely raised his cap to Lydia in salutation and got inside.

Neither made any movement towards shaking hands.

Lydia turned away with the despairing sense that she did not know what to do next.

She felt unable to face Jennie—Jennie, who had given her no confidences, who had told the stranger with whom she thought herself to be in love, that she was "afraid" of her mother! Lydia thought that later on perhaps she might be able to talk to Jennie. For the moment she wanted only to assuage her own desperate pain.

As she turned out of the station, she came face to face with Nathalie's husband, Colonel Kennedy. For an instant her first fear was lest he should notice the misery in her face and ask her what had happened.

But the Colonel only said abruptly:

"London papers not come. I suppose you came on the same errand, Mrs. Damerel? But what's the use—we shall be kept without news till to-morrow now, I suppose. My boy has promised to telegraph from Greenwich. You know his brother has had to rejoin his ship?"

"Aleck?"

"Telegraphed for. We don't even know where he is."

"He seems so young," sighed Lydia. "Well, anyhow, your little Charlie is all right. He'll be out of it all at his age."

"He's only thirteen," said the Colonel gruffly. "They'll rush 'em through like anything, though. I'm glad now that they neither of them had a fancy for soldiering, and chose the Navy instead. They can be

made use of right away, young as they are, if they're wanted."

Lydia looked at him with involuntary admiration.

"How's Nathalie?"

"Come along and see her," said Colonel Kennedy.

Lydia accepted with a certain relief. She wanted to postpone her return home, hardly able to bear the thought of speaking to Jennie, and reflecting also that delay would give her daughter time for thought. She felt, too, with a sudden and most unwonted sense of dependence, that Nathalie was her earliest friend, one of her own time and generation, who would assuredly understand and comfort her.

For the first time she consciously felt need of that quiet, stable affection and friendship of Nathalie's that had always been there, waiting, in the background of Lydia's whole existence.

She raised her tired eyes.

"I'll come with you now," she said to the Colonel. "Poor Nathalie! She must be frightfully anxious, and though one can't do anything, it may be a comfort to her to have someone to talk to."

Involuntarily she put forward Nathalie's possible need of her—not hers of Nathalie.

"Thank you, yes," said the Colonel.

And when he took Lydia into his wife's drawing-room, Nathalie exclaimed gratefully:

"Oh, Lydia, how dear and good of you to come! I knew I should see you soon."

Nathalie showed Lydia the telegram that had recalled their elder boy, the sailor, and speculated vainly as to when they might hope to know where he was, and she recapitulated, with a mixture of wistfulness and pride, the chances that little Charlie, too, would be sent to sea

so peaceful and happy! What to do, Lydia?"

"He's in London. He tol enlist the minute war is dec give him a commission."

"Of course. His poor moth

Lydia let Nathalie go on talk as though she were in a dream.

It seemed to her extraordina was suffering as she had never fore, this supreme preoccupation the whole world, absorbing all tion.

It even struck her as remar presently be having tea with Nat overlooking the garden, and th have made no reference to the t own thoughts.

But, of course, Nathalie knev she were to know, Lydia must been Lydia's way to make conf affairs—Grandpapa's lesson ha

But Nathalie evidently had guessed nothing.

She talked on and on about the war, about her own two boys, and the sons of the neighbouring families in the county. One or two young soldiers she knew had already received peremptory orders to rejoin their regiments.

"That young Scotsman the Bishop's daughter is engaged to has had to go, Lydia. They may even have to put off the wedding. I *do* think it's hard on the girl. If I were her, I should get married as quickly as possible, I think."

"Why?" said Lydia sharply.

"They'll have had something, anyhow, that way. If they were married, she could be with him up to the last minute, and perhaps go and look after him if he's wounded later on. I've heard lots of people say that. Oh, Lydia, it's going to be dreadful for all these young people! Look at your own Jennie—she's not begun life yet, and there she is in the midst of tragedy and horror —all the boys of her own age going off to fight and be killed perhaps. She's had none of the innocent enjoyment that we had yet, and Heaven knows if they'll any of them enjoy anything any more now."

"This nightmare won't last—it *can't* last," said Lydia. "They're young—they'll recover from all this, and have their lives before them. It's we, who know what it all means, that are the worst sufferers, I think. Look at you, Nathalie, having to let Aleck go, and perhaps little Charlie!"

Nathalie shook her head. Her eyes were full of tears, and she did not speak.

Presently her father came and joined them.

Mr. Palmer was a very old man, but he did not seem to Lydia to have changed a great deal since the early

had lost their brightness, and

"You've come to share thi
my dear. That's very good o
and troubled. There is no fr

"Nothing that I know of."

Lydia, overwrought and
blindness, could not withstan
which Mr. Palmer still looke

"I *am* worried—though I h
say anything about it to anyo
little Jennie has been reckless
taking proper care of her."

"Oh, Lydia! Jennie's not
said Nathalie, her voice all gen

"No, no. She's embarked
what to call it, except a sort
Canadian friend of Billy's, th
down here in a flying machine

"I remember," said Natl
Lydia?"

"Rather third-rate—and, b
each other. They just

"He came to-day."

Lydia paused, and her mouth tightened.

She could never bring herself to speak to anyone of the things, the unpardonable things, that young Valentine had said to her. She did not wish to recall them to her own mind, when they stabbed her afresh with every involuntary recollection.

"Well," said Nathalie placidly, "you'll have heaps of things of that sort to reckon with, Lydia, now that Jennie's grown up. I've always thought that girls must be more trouble than boys, especially if they're attractive. Jennie will marry young, I'm sure."

"She won't marry this young man," said Lydia.

Nathalie said something about Canada being a long way off, and then her face changed again.

"But poor little girls of this generation, there may not be anyone for them to marry! Who knows what is going to happen?"

The Rector's eyes had never left Lydia's face.

"Is this young Canadian undesirable in any way, my dear?"

"His manners are not good," Lydia declared. "Really, I know very little about him."

Her tone was quite purposely light, as though by treating the subject casually she were relegating Mr. Roland Valentine and his proposal to the negligible value of a mere episode.

"And little Jennie is in love with him?"

"He is conceited enough to think so," said Lydia. She even laughed, with a curious sense of relief at being able thus trivially to present the Canadian's declared certainty that his love was returned. It was as though, while convincing the Rector and Nathalie, she was also convincing herself. "Jennie and I haven't had

have a man to t
he'll go back to Canada?"

"I suppose so. I don't
She did not want to procla
of taking his aeroplane into
the knowledge would only
unconsidered advice to let th
at its desires of the momen
The child will be wondering
If you get any news, you'll le

"At once. Oh, Lydia, what
to-morrow?"

Lydia went away with the s
her ears. She felt unreasonab
had taken no serious interest i
centring round Jennie and the
that lay in Jennie's mother's h
that the resentment was unjust,
purposely spoken as though th
count.

How could she do otherwise,
in those phrases that Lydia so p
repudiated, in which young Va
taken upon himself to epito



XXVI

THE country had been at war for over a month, and the epidemic of war-marriages had already set in.

Engaged girls bought special licences, bought their own wedding-rings, held everything in readiness for an immediate marriage "whenever he should get leave."

And every day fresh engagements were announced.

"What are they all thinking about?" said Lydia half impatiently, when they heard at Ashlew that the Bishop had taken his daughter to London himself, at twenty-four hours' notice, to marry her Highlander.

She said it only because it seemed to her that everything was conspiring to the ultimate achievement of an immediate marriage between Jennie and Roland Valentine.

It would come to that.

Lydia knew it quite well—had known it with absolute certainty ever since old Lady Lucy—the conservative, the tradition-bound Lady Lucy—had said to her very gently:

"I'm very sorry for you, my dear, but poor little Jennie! Let her be happy while she can. We hear nothing against this young man—quite the contrary—and this is a new world we're going to live in. The old traditions mustn't be made binding on these young folk, who are giving up everything. And I think he is a good young man," said Lady Lucy emphatically.

Valentine was at Ashlew again, with three days' leave before departing with his aeroplane to the front.

"Colonial manners are n
clared Lady Lucy. "My c
essentials, Mr. Valentine is
how the little rule-of-thumb
measured things up to now
any longer. We must go
terrible times—the old, prim

"Supposing I let Jennie m
in a week—what has she gain

"Supposing you *don't* let
killed—what then?" asked the
Jennie ever forgive you, Lydi

"At Jennie's age, though it
to say to her now, one's first l
would almost certainly come t

Lydia's mother-in-law did
the argument applied as muc
widowed as to Jennie unwedd

Instead she put into words
Lydia's own, that she had trie

"My dear, forgive me, but
into consideration Jennie's te
as you say.

one of the most extraordinary things I have ever seen."

Lydia winced.

To her life-long instinct of repression, that ardour of Jennie's, unrestrained as unconcealed, came as something almost shocking.

It was true that Jennie was changed.

Lydia had seen traces of tempestuous tears on her face, on the very evening of the day that Roland Valentine had gone up to London, driven to the station by Lydia.

And Jennie had said:

"I'm crying because I'm so madly happy—I didn't know anybody on earth could be so happy. I can't help crying——"

She cried, but her eyes said, as her lips had said, that it was because she was so madly happy.

When war was declared, and Lydia, white-faced, had bidden Jennie try to realize what it might mean for all of them—for England—for Billy Damerel—for Nathalie's boys—for thousands of other boys—Jennie had said recklessly:

"I know it's all true, and that I don't realize it. I can't even realize Roland is going out there. And whatever happens, nothing can ever—ever take away what I've had."

What Jennie had had!

In those early days she had had less than half-a-dozen meetings with Roland Valentine, one impassioned declaration of love, a brief, imperative farewell, and then only long daily letters, of which Lydia knew nothing but that they sent Jennie, radiant-eyed, to the inditing of blotted, scrawled replies, to be sealed and taken to the post-office in her own clasp.

position to obtain when ne
triumphantly verified. Oth
nie, so far as Lydia was a
but which were stringently
erel and Colonel Kennedy, m
assurances.

And so the young man ca
more, wearing the magic un
display of enthusiasm all ov
appeared.

Lady Lucy capitulated.

The Kennedys, Nathalie e
more cautiously, advocated t
Joyce Damerel had always, u
almost silently, supported Jen
mother.

"Of course they're engage
asked her to be his wife, and s
question is whether you'll l
Lydia. And I don't see how
like these."

Lydia was making her last
self defeated, she knew that
entine would

She argued with them, not because she thought for a moment that argument would convince them, but in a desperate last effort to cheat herself into believing that her attitude was what she represented it to be, and not the mere manifestation of an impassioned resentment that the man to take Jennie from her should be a man who saw her, and would encourage Jennie to see her, with the hard, defiant gaze of youth in judgment.

She had never liked Joyce Damerel, but in the new and overwhelming sense of loneliness that had come upon her, Lydia appealed to Joyce.

"Can't you understand? When all the objections as to Canada, and his not being altogether—quite—and Jennie's youth and all the rest of it—when *they've* all been disposed of, there's still something else, Joyce. Roland Valentine doesn't like me."

"How can you expect him to, when he knows that you're against the marriage?"

"It was before that. A—a sort of antagonism Don't you remember that very first evening of all, when we all dined at Quintmere?"

"I remember that he took Jennie's part every time," said Joyce bluntly. "Surely you wouldn't want him to do anything else, Lydia? If he loves her and is going to marry her, how can you possibly want him to take anybody's part but hers—ever?"

"Why must there be 'parts' to take?"

Joyce shrugged her shoulders.

"Now you're raising another issue altogether."

"Yes, that's quite true," said Lydia, collecting herself. "My point is this, though. An older man—one of more experience and wider sympathies—would have understood my position—my whole attitude in regard to Jennie—and would have brought her, in time, to see

"Do you think I wa
child?" cried Lydia illo

"Yes," said Joyce, "
tioning gratitude from he
tioning acceptance of eve
And it's absolutely again
it, Lydia. Jennie is sturd
If she hadn't been, by thi
her into a helpless, selfish,
of course, she's in a state
wants to be generous and
her turn—and so she ough
all those rights to yoursel

"What you are accusing
"is of having loved Jennie
self too much for her sake

"I?" said Joyce slowly
Lydia, I think you the m
have ever known in my life

Not only the shock of l
but also the amazement of
sonality from Joyce Dame
and seldom vehement, kept
looked at h

I shouldn't have said a word—it was for him to say it, if anyone did, only he never would have. Oh, I know he was your husband, but I knew Clement and his brother in their nursery days—we were all more or less brought up together—and he never *would* have spoken, for fear of hurting you. He'd only have kept Jennie more and more with him. Do you remember when Clement died, how you kept on telling me that Jennie was too young to understand—that she wouldn't really feel it? You didn't want her to feel it, because you wanted to have the sole prerogative of grief. Clement's mother is old, and a saint—even you couldn't grudge her her sorrow; but you knew very well that she wouldn't claim any pity or sympathy—and the very old are too near eternity to get the compassion of the multitude. You wanted it all for yourself—you grudged Jennie her share, and you wouldn't admit that she had any right to suffer at all.

"And it's been like that all along. Jennie may have the nice, little, happy, easy, trivial things—especially if she owes them all to you, and everyone knows it—but the real experiences, the things that hurt and teach one, and are the privilege of the people that are to be worth anything—those she must leave to you. And you try to believe, and to make everyone else believe, that because you make Jennie's clothes, and live economically and are a wonderful manager, and save money for her, and do the tiresome things in the house yourself, so that she can enjoy herself in the garden—because of all that, you love Jennie as no daughter has ever been loved before, and it puzzles and pains everyone that she doesn't seem grateful and loving in return. Well, it isn't Jennie you love at all—it's yourself. I don't believe you've ever loved anyone, Lydia."

was someone then. But yo
or relations to come and sta
do when they marry and hav
us you had cousins, and an au
you up, and friends in Londo
of them. Your aunt came w
and after you'd been marri
Clement wanted her to come w
you who didn't want anyone.'

"It was our home—why sho
Lydia attempted to justify h
without conviction.

Joyce laughed contemptuous

"That cock won't fight, my
came to you, at your own sugg
married a year. Clement's mo
and thought it was a sacrifice y
Nathalie could get married and
Clement could come down he
wasn't a sacrifice, Lydia. No
much as having the *beau rôle.*
else to be in the foreground, a
thing if it'll get you there. Y

told us—do you remember?—that your grandfather had given you a rule, and that you'd kept it all your life—always to let the other people talk about themselves. And you did. You let the people that did love you—Clement, and good, simple Nathalie Kennedy, and little Jennie, at first—you let them all talk about themselves, and you listened, thinking all the time how superior you were to be able to keep your own counsel, and never give yourself away in return. And when you were sympathetic, and said kind things about what they'd told you, they were grateful, and that pleased you, because it put you in the position of giving, while *they* only took. But that sort of thing won't go down for ever with sensitive and loving people. Do you suppose that Clement didn't come to know that there was nothing real behind all your patience, and your sympathy and your listening? You liked to feel that he was dependent on you for something, that was all. You didn't really care for his little, fiddling jobs about the garden, that Jennie loved instinctively; you didn't really care about the parish, and the people, although you liked being the parson's wife, and having them come to you for things. Clement found out what your sympathy was worth, and that his, in return, that he would have given you so lavishly, wasn't what you wanted, or ever would want. He fell in love with your pretty face and your quick wits, and with what he thought was your courage in going to work, as a young girl, in London. And he helped you, when I suppose even you, for once in your life, were frightened and in want of comfort—when you found yourself, an ignorant and helpless child, on the verge of being mixed up in the divorce scandals of your employer. You'd got down to bedrock that time, I imagine, and needed someone

first bewildered, and not ur
that you lacked, and then gr
realized long ago—that you
body on earth, except as it afl

Joyce, as she had told Lydi

The two women faced one a
another moment.

Then Joyce Damerel turne

Lydia, sitting huddled in a
with eyes that conveyed ha
stunned mind, saw her sister-i
away swiftly across the garde

She was left alone.

Jennie and young Valentin

The house was curiously si

So that was what Joyce
matter? Joyce and she had
and Joyce's opinion did not
much. . . .

Only gradually was Lydia's
the real point at issue.

Were these accusations tru

Falteringly, and very, very

orphanship must be subordinated. She had hardly regretted her mother's death at all, partly because it had freed her from the capricious tyranny of weakness, principally because it had left her, undisputed, the first right to consideration and compassion.

Through the inauguration of her life in the little Regency Terrace household.

She had known all the time, even as a little girl, that Aunt Evelyn was silly and snobbish, Aunt Beryl limited and provincial, Uncle George pedantic with his perpetual Mr. Barlow monologues on uninteresting subjects, their old friend, Mr. Monteagle Almond, a pompous and narrow-minded little bank clerk, who had never made any success of his life.

They had been very kind to her, had admired and praised her cleverness, without stint as without discrimination, and had trustfully displayed their real characteristics to the little Daniel come to judgment, who had always listened and responded so intelligently and gently.

She had taken what they offered, keeping her own counsel all the time, and inwardly criticizing and despising them.

Grandpapa—but Grandpapa had known all the while. One could not doubt for an instant that Grandpapa's shrewdness had penetrated through all the good behaviour and proper deference of the little girl Lydia, to the acute self-interest that had actuated the good behaviour and the deference.

Grandpapa had known.

Perhaps at first it had amused him. His teaching had not been of tolerance or humility, but of bracing self-repression and self-advancement: "There's no such thing as can't." "Don't give everything a personal

admiration. But there had
too, surely. Across Lydia'
half-obliterated procession c
had walked up and down th
arm, pouring out the stories
adventures, school tragedies,
them.

"You won't repeat this tc
you? I can trust you? . . .

Oh, yes, Lydia could be t
long, involved histories. Re
for the tale-bearer. Natural
ousness combined had preven
return confidences. "Always
about themselves." Then the
tion at once and for ever.

Lydia had tacitly accepted
implied friendships, but she h
to be vastly superior to them.

Through the school years
Nathalie Palmer, the girl fro
—dress—accent—all slightly
the town girls at the schoo

self-expression with her. The friendship with Nathalie had survived their shared school days, given fresh impetus, on Lydia's side, by the consciousness that the grey-headed, distinguished-looking Rector, the devoted father of Nathalie, had approved of her clever schoolmate, and suggested that later on she should come and stay at the Devonshire Rectory.

The end of school—and a catastrophe that still loomed large on the sky-line of Lydia's memory. Illness on the very verge of the examination that was to crown so many minor honours.

Even the pitying attention so lavishly bestowed upon her had not atoned for that calamity, especially when so much of it, unprecedentedly, had diverged from herself to Aunt Beryl, a sudden rival claimant to illness.

On and on through those old, past times—the visit to Wimbledon, and the intolerable, bouncing, boisterous Senthovens. Even Lydia had only been able to endure, garnering what profit to herself was possible from their slangy, elliptical instruction—more than mere endurance would have been impossible. And, after all, no need to assume sympathy or admiration in the case of the loud and self-satisfied Senthovens. They took tribute to their prowess for granted—wanted no demonstrations. "No nonsense about *us!*" cried they.

Nevertheless, the Senthovens had been ready enough with shouted congratulations and boastings, and had made ungrudging jubilee over Lydia's success, to them so incomprehensible and unattainable, in the great school examination.

Lydia remembered quite well how the news had come, and rescued her from her humiliating standing as the spoil-sport of the party, who had clumsily contrived to hurt Olive Senthoven in a game of cricket. It

had also distracted all the attention from Olive and her bruised face, and focussed it upon Lydia, rescuing her once and for all from the ignominy of her position amongst the Senthovens.

After school days and the Senthovens, her bid for independence and London.

Backwards still, through the days of that early, bewildering experiment. From Elena herself, that peroxide blonde of such astute experience, to the pallid young ladies in Millinery—Lydia's personality had made conquests of them all. How freely they had giggled and gossiped before her, and eventually poured out their confidences just as recklessly as the little schoolgirls at Miss Glover's!

In those days, Lydia had really admired her own diplomacy, that had so quickly established her as general favourite in a community with which she really had so little in common. Shrewd, pale-faced Rosie Graham didn't matter. One had thought she did at first, because she had brains and acumen, and something in her very scornfulness itself was oddly alluring. A certain attraction about Miss Graham—until measured by the standard of importance applied to one's first affair with a man.

Margoliouth. His oily and uninspired pawings—there was no other word for them, in the retrospect—had certainly roused no ardour in Lydia. It had merely been agreeable to feel herself the centre of speculation amongst the matrons and spinsters of Miss Nettleship's boarding-house. And, competent to take care of herself, in the accepted sense of the words, Lydia had discreetly permitted the Greek's advances, conscious all the time of the prestige accruing to her from theatre

expeditions, hansom-cab drives, gifts of violets and boxes of Cadbury's chocolates.

She had viewed as a safeguard her own perfectly distinct inward determination that Margoliouth should never be allowed, in return for these favours, to overstep the limits set by Lydia's careful sense of discretion.

Disaster and humiliation had threatened the termination of that episode, the first hint of which had been Miss Nettleship's plaintive and nervously-spoken warning of the Greek gentleman's inability to meet his bills. A worse revelation, then, and a more public one, had been that of Mrs. Margoliouth's unexpected existence. Pain had really threatened then—had hung like a descending cloud above Lydia's humiliated head.

But her secret boast had been that, after all, she had turned that defeat into victory. The victory of a fine attitude, that had won her a great deal of admiration and a pity that was not condescending, from all the spectators of the little, sordid drama. It had also brought her an odd revelation, that she remembered still: the conviction that there was no calamity without its available compensation, in the shape of a not at all discreditable notoriety.

Through the phases of her youth still. The writing of her story, and the introduction that it had brought her, through voluble Miss Forster, to the unforgettable Lady Honoret. Certainly, her wit and determination had made the very most of that introduction, aided by the curious success that her novel had achieved. A side-issue, Lydia envisaged also the fact that she had ceased to write when success in writing had ceased to have any value for enhancing her position amongst her

surroundings. The writing, like everything else, had only been a means to an end.

Backwards, through that far-away summer holiday that she had manœuvred to obtain at Nathalie's home in Devonshire, gratifying at once her love of gratitude and her desire to justify her own careful schemings by inducing Aunt Beryl to receive Miss Nettleship in her stead at Regency Terrace.

Then the delight of making a success in her new *milieu*—of knowing that admiring Nathalie and the simple-minded Rector were full of praise and thanks for the able help that she had so soon learnt to give them. Certainly they had had the assistance that her quick brain and nimble fingers could bestow, but the things that they had given her were things of the spirit —affection, and trust, and loyal admiration, and for these they had met with no return in kind.

Was it that Lydia was incapable of them?

Joyce said that Clement had come to recognize it. With the remembrance came, shudderingly and reluctantly, but with relentless inevitability, the linking up of the past with the present.

Clement, who had puzzled and almost angered Lydia by his gradual transition during their married life, from eager confidences and ardent demonstrations to strange, apathetic reticences—Clement lived on in his daughter Jennie.

That which she had never acknowledged to herself for the sake of Clement, for whom her love had been a tepid thing, undeserving of the name, Lydia was coming to recognize for the sake of Clement's child.

Jennie was the first person whom Lydia had loved, and as Rosie Graham had predicted long, long ago, she had "not known how to set about it."



Loving Jennie, she had yet, as Joyce Damerel said, taken all the greater things for herself, and left Jennie only the less. For herself, the *beau rôle,* for Jennie that of foil.

Across her ravaged perceptions tore yet another recollection, one that this time seemed to summarize them all.

She heard again Grandpapa's thin old voice, with its cynical intonation:

"You're a situation-snatcher, Lydia—that's what you are. A situation-snatcher."

Grandpapa had known.

"MAMA, the telegram
days' leave—he'll be in Lo
Jennie's voice held a kin
unbelievable had come to p
"I'll take you there," sai
The concession had been
tember, when Jennie, com
spent with her lover, had
chair by the window of the
vacant gaze and chilly hands
But although Lydia had
degree revoked that half-s
engagement, that had been
in the midst of the hour of
had ever known, she coulc
Jennie's sudden, unregulat
gratitude.
"Oh, mama! You'll take
"I told you I would, wh
wants the wedding immedia
Jennie nodded.
"If he has ten days you
town by special license and

old lawyers and people—and then come back here for my wedding, and go somewhere in the country for a tiny honeymoon, till the last possible minute."

Lydia was surprised.

"It'll be much more tiring for you—a lot of rushing about like that."

Her instinct was always to shield Jennie from Jennie's self.

"Roland wants it to be like that, too." The defiant gleam of one who expects opposition had come into Jennie's eyes again.

"Don't, Jennie, take that tone. I'm not saying you shan't have it your own way. Why do you want to be married here, and not in London, which would be so much simpler?"

"It's my home," cried Jennie, "and, besides, I want to have all the people I can; even if I *have* got to be married in a travelling dress, and without proper bridesmaids or anything, I may as well have *some* fun. We don't know any people in London."

She spoke like a child, Lydia reflected.

And yet, when they met Roland Valentine in London twenty-four hours later, Jennie no longer spoke like a child. She was quite different—infinitely more reposeful, gentler. more womanly.

Was this the real Jennie? Lydia's perceptions were far too acute for her not to know that it was with Roland, not with herself, that Jennie was at ease, and therefore was absolutely natural.

Roland Valentine himself pleased Lydia better than on any former occasion. He, too, was graver and more quiet, and he thanked her very earnestly for giving her consent to an immediate wedding.

They went to lawyers, to banks, to jewellers and in-



Jennie had never be
but it never seemed to c
her confidence now, any
it to her in the course of

Lydia, although she h
had never suffered from
merly, she might have to
confidence to bestow—tha
face. Now, she was slow
the recognition, forced to
ence of a definite and ind
the potential woman, as
Damerel's child.

On the day before that
Devonshire, Jennie unexp
they could not "look up At

"I've seen Roland's rela
land, at least, and I think

"So he has. He's been
your grandmother and Bil

Lydia had not the sligh
Senthovens, and, once mo
conviction that what

sorts of relations I have, as well as people like Grannie and Aunt Joyce."

The recollection flashed across Lydia's mind incontinently of the care with which she, engaged to be married to Jennie's father, had avoided any such display of relatives and their "ordinariness."

However, Roland Valentine, the Canadian mechanic, would scarcely prove critical.

Lydia sent a prepaid telegram to Regency Terrace, and received Aunt Beryl's laconic reply:

"Delighted."

The short, familiar journey was thronged for Lydia, in her new mood of painful introspection, with such memories as it seemed never to have held before.

Jennie and Roland Valentine sat opposite to her in the train. They talked to one another in low tones, and every now and then looked into one another's eyes. It seemed to Lydia that, even in the gaze of the young man who had already been at the front for more than three months, there was no apprehension of parting—only the ecstatic recognition of an immense bliss.

She felt herself overwhelmingly lonely.

Regency Terrace, as usual, looked astonishingly unchanged. One almost expected to see Grandpapa's head at the bow window of the dining-room behind the lace curtains, to hear Shamrock's shrill, eager barking on the steps.

Aunt Beryl wore a dark-blue skirt and a flannel blouse with a high collar, just as she had worn every winter ever since Lydia could remember her.

"Come in, dear—I'm ever so pleased to see you. How do you do, Mr. Valentine? I'm quite well, thank you. Well, Jennie, I declare!"

Aunt Beryl looked at Jennie with an open adoration

you get the chance. She's a
girl for wanting to do this w
enough, and will knock hers
we know the matron that E
all."

Aunt Beryl shook her head,
the drawing-room.

If Jennie wanted Roland V
fact that she possessed relation
as "ordinary," Lydia reflected
satisfied now.

Never had the Regency Ter
such a perfect apotheosis of th

Olive, in a dark-blue unif
extraordinarily flat-chested, s
over the fire, her face unbe
Evelyn was in the arm-chair th
but it, too, had been drawn cl
behind which burned a piled-
stantly replenished by Olive fr

Mrs. Senthoven had visil
sister had not.

Her increasing deafness —

With a sort of shock, Lydia realized that Aunt Evelyn must be past sixty.

They had to shout at her, for she would not always make use of her ear-trumpet.

"Mother does hate that old trumpet of hers," said Olive in explanation. "I tell her she ought to see some of the things our men in hospital have to put up with—artificial legs, and glass eyes, and goodness knows what-all."

Olive could talk of nothing but the hospital.

She had only been working there a month.

"This Sister, I can tell you—Sister McGregor, as she calls herself—she's a terror. A great, big woman, she is, and wears the scarlet and grey uniform—you know. Well, what d'you think the men call her? She's a thumping great piece, I must tell you—as broad as she's long, and *that's* saying something. Well, the men call her 'The Thin Red Line!' Isn't that great, now?"

Roland Valentine shouted with laughter, and Jennie laughed too. Even Aunt Beryl, to whom Lydia felt sure that the story could not be new, displayed a sympathetic mirth, and Olive's mother inquired querulously what the joke was?

"It's an old one, mother," screamed Olive. "You've heard it already."

"But what *was* it?" persisted Aunt Evelyn suspiciously.

It was Roland Valentine who picked up the trumpet and loudly repeated into it Olive's successful anecdote.

Soon it became evident that the introduction of Roland to Jennie's family was to be crowned with success.

The young man talked about Canada to Bob's mother, and was shown the photograph of Bob, and

you seen this one of pore ol
Lydia?"

It was a large group. Six
ing from the ages of fifteen t
girls had frizzed-out hair, and
over their stuff dresses, and
boys, were in velveteen suits,
and the other a bucket. The
cated a sea-scape behind the gr

"Regular Swaines, aren't th
tentedly. "Not a Senthoven a
at least, not in appearance."

"Why, hasn't this fine little
his auntie?" inquired Roland
least unattractive of Mrs. Swa

Olive looked gratified.

"Funny you should say th
Horace—and he *is* a good bit
family than any of the other
take after their father in any
say."

"Don't you like him, then?
centlv.

Swaine. She had indeed systematically evaded all Jennie's inquiries about her contemporary cousins.

"Like him?" said Olive explosively. "Hark at her, Lydia! Why, he's a bad lot, Jennie—that's what he is—a regular scallywag. He—you know."

An expressive pantomime of tilted-up arm and hand and a motion as of swallowing completed Olive's terse description of her brother-in-law's failing.

"Ah, a lot of good fellows get their lives spoilt that way," said Valentine sympathetically—but quite matter-of-factly, thought Lydia.

"Him and Beatrice ought never to have been allowed to go about together the way they did," said Aunt Evelyn suddenly. "I blame myself."

"Now, now, now—tell us all about this wedding of yours, Jennie," said Aunt Beryl, violently tactful.

"A regular war-wedding, isn't it?" said Olive. "One of our nurses at the hospital the other day got a telegram just like that to say that her *fiasco* was coming on leave, and they were to get married straight away. So this girl I'm telling you about, this nurse—she went straight off with twenty-four hours' leave—that was all they'd give her, if you please—and simply came back married."

"Only twenty-four hours!" exclaimed Jennie. "What did the husband do?"

"Oh, came down with her, of course, and stayed at the hotel."

"Well, I think it was too bad," Aunt Beryl remarked with finality. "Only giving her twenty-four hours like that, poor thing."

"One's got to think of the work," said Olive, shaking her head. "We're fearfully full up just now. I

come home to her after l

Lydia had far too mu
betrayal of her thought l
but she knew by intuition
frightened, half-mischievou
fashion.

"I'd like to have Jennie c
where," declared Roland
for my leave, or if I get se

"We might find a flat in

"There are all sorts of
being opened everywhere,"

The implication was obvi

At four o'clock Olive r
been glancing surreptitiousl
ten minutes.

"Well, I suppose I must b
she said with an affectatio
much as my place is worth
going on duty."

"I told the girl to put a
dining-room, dear. You've
I've got now," said Aunt Ber

far as the tramway centre?" suggested Aunt Beryl, with a kindly gleam of rather pallid mirth directed at the Canadian.

"Sure! Will you, Jennie?"

"Come on, then. Goo'-bye, auntie; goo'-bye, Lydia, ole gurl. Awfully glad to have seen you—'specially in these busy days. Ta-ta!"

Olive clattered from the room, quite in the old, breezy Senthoven manner.

"She won't be back till ten o'clock to-night, as likely as not," moaned her mother.

"She's looking very well on it," declared Aunt Beryl stoutly. "Lydia, don't you think Olive looks ever so much better for the interest?"

Lydia agreed with complete sincerity.

Aunt Beryl sat down by the fire, and there was a certain relaxation, as from a long strain, in her bearing.

"Those are the lucky ones, those that have a job. There's poor George eating his heart out because he's past the age for even the volunteers. It does seem hard, too. All he can do is to stay overtime at the office, doing the work of young fellows who've gone to the war. Lydia, that's a fine young chap that Jennie's got there."

"I'm glad you like him, Aunt Beryl," said Lydia gently.

Her tone held no hint of disagreement. To disparage her accepted son-in-law would have offended her taste, besides mitigating her claim to self-sacrificed motherhood.

"Dear little Jennie! She's full young—but you weren't much older when you were married yourself, Lydia."

successively
Joyce Damerel.

"She'll mend of that fa
dear! Besides," said Aur
know that she's so much
gagement will have steac
great difference. Evelyn,
less of a child—more gro

"What, dear?"

"Tell Lydia whether yo
more of a woman since sh
Aunt Beryl.

"Oh! Yes, poor little Je
made over in this awful wa
who count for anything no

"She hasn't heard," said
ing her head.

But the observation of the
so irrelevant, at least to the
Lydia's sub-consciousness.

Only the young people co
who, in every sense

"Ah, yes—I expect you feel that," said Aunt Beryl with strange matter-of-factness.

"I would so gladly take it all for her."

Even as she spoke Lydia realized the full truth of the words. How much easier it would be, how far less costly to herself, to know Jennie ignorant and happy, while she herself, a recognized victim, faced a suffering that would be rendered entirely bearable by that very fact.

"I'm sure it's very hard to sit by and see others suffer," said Aunt Beryl tritely, and added in the same rather monotonous voice, "I was very fond of your mother, Lydia, and I remember quite well thinking how much easier it would have been when your poor father died if I could have had the pain of it all to myself, instead of having to feel for her, and Aunt Evelyn there, as well. There was a sort of selfishness in it, like, I daresay."

"Aunt Beryl," said Lydia suddenly, "should you say that I was selfish with Jennie?"

"How do you mean, dear, exactly?"

There was nothing in Aunt Beryl's voice that showed her protesting, as Lydia inwardly craved that she should protest, at the mere suggestion.

"Then you do think so?"

"No—oh, no, Lydia. I shouldn't say that, dear."

They both glanced at Mrs. Senthoven.

She had fallen into a doze, and was nodding over the red fire.

Lydia's misery drove her to a form of self-revelation utterly foreign to her.

"I—I've been worried lately. Joyce—my sister-in-law—who has never liked me—began to talk about Jennie the other day. And she sounded as though—as

Jennie since her father
young woman when I
have married again."

"I *have* sometimes w

"Of course, living qu
try, I practically never
—I could have married."

"I daresay that would

"But don't you see, th
nie could no longer be
I've always put her first,

"She's grown up a ve
Aunt Beryl expressionless

"If she were marrying
liked—and there wasn't th
it all; if I could only feel t
ness, naturally and normall
her. It's the lot of parents
ness gladly—if only I didn'
or grief may be coming to
take in her stead."

"Well, of course you kno
her own life."

Lydia had never held Aunt Beryl's opinions in high esteem. Indeed, there were very few opinions so to hold. One talked with Aunt Beryl of the people one knew, of household difficulties, and of clothes. Never of abstract questions, nor of inner perplexities. One knew instinctively that for such she would have no solution to offer.

And yet Aunt Beryl's simple statement that Jennie had to live her own life carried with it to Lydia an altogether disproportionate dismay.

"To see one's own child suffer—it's far worse than suffering oneself," she reiterated helplessly.

"I'm not saying it isn't hard on you, dear."

Aunt Beryl softly picked up the little knitted shawl that had slipped from Mrs. Senthoven's shoulders and replaced it without waking her.

"I'm sure it isn't good for Aunt Evelyn to sleep in the day-time the way she does, Lydia. It isn't what I call wholesome sleep either—hark at the way she's breathing!"

Aunt Beryl reseated herself.

"About what we were saying, dear. No doubt, you'll say, me being an old maid, I can hardly enter into a mother's feelings, and probably it's the case. But I always remember that time, years and years ago, Lydia, when you went off to London to that Madame Elena's, that shop—I always remember what a way I was in about it. Feeling you were too young, you know, and that someone ought to stand between you and the world, and so on and so forth. You know the way one goes on, dear. And then something or other set me thinking—and Mr. Monteagle Almond and Uncle George and I got talking one evening, I remember, and it seemed as though it would be more myself

... as though
young people suffer
that's the way they'r
"But I want to se
piteously.
"I suppose there's
been sorrow too," saic
Her speech had nev
such as Lydia had inst
to avoid.
"If you can reach th
I wish you'd ring, dear.
be a bit more punctual
very bad that way. Sh
wait the teapot for Jen
tea up here this afterno
dining-room. I thought
"Of course," said Lydi
they'll be back in a minu
I knew what was best fo
"I should let her judg
should," said Aunt Beryl
more ...

"You mean that I've got to sacrifice Jennie for Jennie's own good?"

The door of the drawing-room opened.

"You can start bringing up the tea-things, Gladys," said Aunt Beryl. "Don't make the tea until the young lady and gentleman are in—they've left the door on the jar, but in case you don't hear them I'll ring."

"Yes, Miss Raymond."

Gladys went away again.

"She's quite a smart-looking girl, isn't she, Lydia?" said her mistress complacently. "And one doesn't have to keep nagging all the time—she's thoroughly willing. You were saying, dear, that you ought to sacrifice Jennie for her own good, but I don't know that that's exactly how I'd put it, myself. It's more sacrificing yourself that I meant—sacrificing your own feelings, like."

Another echo.

Roland Valentine had said: "It's only another kind of sacrifice that's wanted . . . the way you can do it best is just the way that'll hurt you most. . . . Let her take her own risks and shoulder her own responsibilities."

Yes—it was just the way that hurt Lydia most. No doubt of that.

"That's the hall-door! If the water's boiling—*really* boiling, mind, Gladys—you can make the tea, and bring up the hot toast."

Aunt Evelyn woke suddenly.

"Tea already?" she said eagerly. "I must have closed my eyes. It's a shame Olive couldn't stop for a nice cosy tea by the fire before going out."

"She had a cup in the dining-room, dear—Gladys had it all ready—and a piece of cake."

"I don't like this mad way of scamping her meals," said Aunt Evelyn dejectedly. "Fancy that now, Lydia! A bitter wind like to-day and there's Olive will come home, on the top of a tram as like as not, with her chest and all, at nine or ten o'clock to-night."

Aunt Beryl firmly picked up the ear-trumpet, adjusted it, and spoke through it with vigour.

"Olive's all right, Evelyn! You know the doctor said she could try it for a bit, and she was wild to do something for the war. She'd have fretted herself to fiddlestrings if she hadn't got this job."

They both of them spoke, Lydia thought with a little amusement, as though Olive were quite a young girl, instead of a middle-aged woman.

As Aunt Beryl's shrill voice ceased, her sister nodded her head reluctantly.

"Well, well, it's a terrible war, and I wish I were good for anything besides knitting. Though they say the boys out there can't have enough woollies. But it would be easier to go out and do the hard work oneself, if only one could, and leave the children safe at home, like when they were little. I expect you're beginning to feel that, Lydia. It's the way of the world, and we must just make the best of our shelf, now we're on it."

Aunt Evelyn even laughed a little.

But Lydia felt as though the whole world were in league against her.



XXVIII

THEY did not go down to Devonshire until the middle of the following day.

Lydia had the whole morning to herself, even after she had finished packing up her small suit-case and Jennie's. This time Jennie had made no protest when her mother began to pack for her. She and Roland had gone out together quite early, and although Lydia thought that they had told her of their destination, she seemed able to remember nothing but the essential fact that they were to meet her at the station at one o'clock.

In the meanwhile she felt an urgent need of occupation, and remembered an apologetic request of Aunt Beryl's.

"I don't know whether you could ever recommend poor Maria Nettleship's rooms to any of your friends, Lydia—but it would be a real kindness. The boarding-house has been giving her ever so much trouble lately—and then this war coming. One doesn't know how things will be, and she hasn't got much put by, I'm afraid. I never hear from her without she asks after you in the letter, you know. She's never forgotten you, and if ever you're up that way, I know it will give her real pleasure to see you. But, of course, she understands you're busy."

So far as Miss Nettleship was concerned, Lydia had been busy for many years.

Now, however, half curious and half listless, she found herself in the old Bloomsbury neighbourhood.

Aunt Beryl, and anythi
alone with one's though
to a more active realiz
hended truths. Europe
to be married, a mere ba
cared nothing for the tra
brought up, who upheld
mother, and would, if h
. . . no one left. . . . I
band and her boys. . . .
young grandson, the only
the fighting-line . . . no
save Lydia's racked and

She shuddered involun

"Miss Nettleship?"

"Will you step up into
maid.

She preceded Lydia
sleeves of her dress as sh

"I'll tell Miss Nettleshi

Lydia heard her clatt
doubt Miss Nettleship wa
the activities of a success

The drawing-room was still furnished in yellow, the heavy gilding of the mirror over the mantelpiece seemed only slightly more chipped and tarnished. There was no fire, although it was cold.

The smell of distant, greasy cooking still hung in the air.

On a small shelf in a corner were some very dirty and tattered numbers of the *Lady's Realm,* "Molly Bawn," devoid of cover, and the novel written nearly twenty years ago by Lydia herself.

Time worked very few changes at Miss Nettleship's house in Bloomsbury.

Lydia looked up when the door of the drawing-room opened, feeling sure that she would have no difficulty in recognizing Miss Nettleship, although it was nearly six years since they had last met, on one of Lydia's infrequent expeditions to Regency Terrace.

But in effect they were strangers to her who entered the room, although a curious sense of familiarity seemed to indicate that the type was not new to her.

Both ladies were middle-aged, both looked pinched and cold and shabby, and both gave Lydia the same furtive, hesitating bow as they passed.

They took their seats on either side of the empty grate, and talked to each other in low, discontented murmurs.

"It's too bad not to have a fire a day like this, with the dining-room smoking so that one can't stay in the room."

"She said she'd have the fire in here lit after midday dinner. I thought I'd tell you, Mrs. Morrison, knowing how bad your chest has been, so that we could slip out of the dining-room early, and get two nice chairs and

"Oh, no! Only just g

"Is that all? I thoug morning, didn't you?"

"Downright robbery, c It isn't at all the sort of right to expect in a Resi

"The porridge burnt—

"And all the toast finis minutes late. . . . Old M helping himself to two pi do it. And one doesn't lik

"Certainly not. It isn't it's the principle of the thi

"Miss Nettleship ought of course, there it is—he's care what he pays—natu him."

"Oh, naturally. Why, of ordering in wine for season."

"Of course, it's good fo things delivered at the do shops."

warmth, and grasping fellow-boarders, year in and year out.

"They say this war is going to affect the price of food, and there'll be things we shan't be able to get any more."

"Ah, things we've been getting from Germany, I daresay that would be," vaguely said the spinster, Miss Parry.

"I should have thought we could make anything here that the Germans could make, I must say."

"Not at the price though," said Miss Parry sagely. "They've been making a regular business of cheap trades, you know. That's part of their cleverness."

"Ah, I daresay. They say the Kaiser had all this war planned out as far back as the old Queen's death. How he can sleep in his bed at night, I can't imagine!"

"Perhaps he can't," said Miss Parry darkly. "*I* couldn't, in his place, I know that."

"Oh, nor could I."

The ladies fell silent, perhaps each imagining herself in the unenviable position of the potentate under discussion. Lydia felt sure that such a flight of fancy was well within the humourless capacity of each.

When the door opened again and Miss Nettleship came in, very fat, and panting a great deal, but otherwise unchanged, Miss Parry and Mrs. Morrison watched with furtive eagerness her enthusiastic greeting of Lydia, whilst pretending to conceal themselves behind the loose sheets of an illustrated paper.

The uncertain movement made by Mrs. Morrison towards the door was forestalled by Miss Nettleship, however.

"Come into my room for a little chat," she begged Lydia. "I've a sitting-room now, besides the office."

Miss Nettleship knelt d
out difficulty, and applied
A fierce, yapping sound
flame appeared, gradually
grate, and began to glow
heat that seemed to scorch
in spite of the shallow pa
front of the grate. Lydia,
reflected that it was a long
the dry, odorous heat of a
race they made use of sm
most of the hearths that she
wood.

Miss Nettleship assailed
and interested questions. S
and reputation everyone b
Damerel, and inquired so
anxiously for news of her
ately for his mother.

At Lydia's replies she no
her round, absorbed brown
to time: "Of course—one
erel. I quite understand."



ance that Lydia would remember even as she herself did.

"You'll want to hear of the people who were here in your time. Let me see now—we'd Miss Forster then, of course. Did your auntie tell you about her?—I remember I wrote to her about it when the accident happened."

"What accident?"

"Oh, poor thing, she got run over in the street, and died in hospital—about five years ago it must have been. She'd left here, you know, and gone into rooms. But I went to the inquest, of course—naturally I did," said Miss Nettleship with mournful pride. "She'd put on a lot of flesh, poor thing, and it was quite a shock to see how stout she'd grown. She often asked after you, you know."

Lydia had not known. It surprised her again and again to hear of the extraordinary fidelity with which so many of these people, in their limited circles of interests, had remembered her.

"There was that old lady who had a weak heart—Miss Lillicrap—what happened to her?"

"Poor Miss Lillicrap! She was old, you see, and ill, and one couldn't say much—but you know how it was. She lost me some very good boarders," said Miss Nettleship, shaking her head. "It was always the same thing at the dinner-table, you see—grumbling at the food, yet taking more than her fair share. I had to tell her that her room was wanted at last, and she must leave. I never heard what happened to her, but she went away very angry, and left a lot of extras unpaid. You wouldn't believe the way people think nothing of leaving their extras unpaid, Mrs. Damerel."

tor, did very well out the
years ago. But the wid
in B.C. And talking of
you used to know gone
fly! It must be nearly fi
"Who?"
"A Mrs. Prince, she w
told me she'd known you
remembering you that sen
rooms in London for a bit
was."
"I don't remember——'
"She was at a place of
Elena's it used to be called
Miss Nettleship delicate
Lydia's own connection wi
Rosie Graham, the little
Lydia remembered well
elusive figures that peopled
Graham had remained by fa
"Oh! Did she go to Aus
"She was married to an
nice fellow," said Miss Nettl
ing. "They'd only been mar-



after that, but I'm sure they're happy. He was such a nice fellow, and they were so fond of each other."

"I'm glad she's happy," said Lydia, rather to her own surprise. "I never imagined she would marry, though. I never knew she was engaged."

"Oh, she told me they hadn't been going together for very long before they got married. Quite well-to-do, he was, and she wouldn't have to go out to work, though I believe the women in Australia do all their own housework always. But Mrs. Prince was as pleased as anything at going off to Sydney. I must say, I do like to see what I call a real love-match," said Miss Nettleship in a tone of satisfaction.

Lydia looked at the stout, overworked woman, with her greying hair and the wrinkles round her brown eyes. Those inexpressive, kindly eyes, that actually seemed to look out with pleasure and interest still on a world that was narrowed to the dimensions of the Bloomsbury boarding-house.

As though in answer to her unspoken thought, Miss Nettleship turned to the eager expression of her own solicitude for Lydia and Lydia's concerns.

"Of course, I've heard about your daughter going to be married. She does seem young, but that's the way nowadays. This war! But I hope you're pleased, Mrs. Damerel?"

"He's a Colonial, too—a Canadian," Lydia replied indirectly.

"So your auntie told me. Well, I'm sure he's very lucky. But he's out at the war, with this machine of his, isn't he? It'll be hard for her to see him go off again after the wedding."

"Yes—for both of us. I—I've so wanted little Jennie to be happy."

oh, Mrs. Damerel," sai
"sometimes I've thought
I am, and just have myt
think of what the wives
are going through, I re
spared something I could
ful to have things the wa

So that was Maria Ne
cated point of view. Sh
she was out of the swirl
emotions, safely set aside
upon the bank.

Not for her the strange
Lydia resented the sight o
in which she had no shar
craving to be once more in
stances, to hold the centre
garner experience wholesa
out grudgingly to a youn

Lydia left Miss Nettles
ceived only one more proo
a very desert of isolation.
stood—could ever underst

importance of personal suffering and the exploitation of it.

They thought that those were to be pitied who were bearing the brunt of pain and privation. But Lydia knew that the pity, and the pride, and the sympathy made up for all the pain and the privation.

She clenched her hands, and sweat broke out upon her forehead.

In the losses of her childhood, the struggle of her girlhood, in her premature widowhood, had she ever suffered as she was suffering now, when no one recognized her claims to impassioned pity any more?

Lydia knew that for the first time in all her life she was really suffering.

She felt as though something within her were being killed by agonized inches.

Something that would not die.

If once it died the suffering would be over, and she herself left shattered, no longer keenly sentient. But it would not die.

She met Jennie and Roland at the station, and they got into the train together.

On the journey, it penetrated to her understanding for the first time that the marriage was to take place on the next day but one.

"Monday? That's the day after to-morrow."

"But mama——" Jennie gave her a quick, alarmed glance. "We always did say Monday, if it could be managed. And I asked Aunt Joyce to see if it would be all right about the church that day, and she wired back yes. I showed you the telegram yesterday evening!"

"I'd forgotten," said Lydia.

She saw Jennie look at Roland Valentine with a

reached Clyst Milton, a
of a missing suit-case, '
He's going straight to C
at church to-morrow and
lunch. You and I will ha
to-night."

Jennie was trying to
she thought was her moth

She was very gentle
from Roland, who came
threshold of Lydia's cott

"They'll put up the pc
for to-night, and we can
morrow. The man will
church. . . ."

Jennie slipped her hanc

Lydia realized that they
few hours together in ord
to herself for one evening

"Good night," she said
into the house, leaving the

Why should Jennie, the invariably robust, elect to look tired to-night?

Then Lydia remembered how much shopping and walking and travelling and interviewing had been crowded into the last two days for the girl unaccustomed to London, and her heart smote her. If Jennie's fatigue was physical, there was nothing to resent. She was entitled to it. Lydia followed her usual methods and said gently:

"Would you like your dinner in bed? I can bring it up to you myself, and sit with you afterwards."

"You're tired too, mama," said Jennie quickly. "Much more tired than I am, *I* think. Let's just have dinner early and then sit in the drawing-room over the fire, all quiet and comfy, just you and me."

She looked at her mother wistfully, as though seeking to make instinctive amends for she knew not what.

During dinner they spoke of the wedding arrangements, of Jennie's hastily selected trousseau, and of the rooms secured by Lady Lucy at a North Devon fishing village for the brief honeymoon.

Jennie grew excited; the slight look of strain left her round, childish face, and she talked eagerly about her plans.

"I'll telegraph to you, mama, what day I'm coming back here. Of course, I shall go to London with Roland to—to see him off."

Jennie's lip suddenly quivered at the allusion, and she talked faster than ever, and in the old, rather arrogant strain, as though to reassure herself by a display of great self-confidence.

"I don't know exactly what I shall do eventually, you know, mama. I think I ought to find some war-work, and Roland would like me to be in London, and

"Oh," said Jennie a
beforehand. There n
pital work."

Lydia could not hel
trained, inexperienced
and she knew that some
ing in her face.

"I *must* learn to do
though in answer to Ly
as she spoke.

The defiant note had
the vexed consciousness

"Certainly. Up to n
very willing to be taught
know that you can attend
that they're getting up so
other things; and if you
day usefulness, I could
keeping."

Lydia was perfectly aw
some imperative desire to
the atmosphere made her
she spoke.

They

She was never diplomatic, poor Jennie, and a far less acute hearer, and one much less familiar with her every intonation than was the observant Lydia, would have known that her hasty, nervously-spoken speech was premeditated.

"Wouldn't it be rather fun, in a way—as I can't have a proper home of our own with Roland till the war's over—for me to find a tiny flat or something in London, and make it all nice and live in it, and—and you come up and stay with me, mama, when you want a day or two in London?"

"Is that your idea—or his?"

"I—I suppose both of us planned it together. I wouldn't let Roland say anything to you about it—I wanted to tell you myself."

Jennie looked at her mother with unconsciously imploring eyes, that beseeched her to receive at least in silence a decision which both of them knew to be epoch-making.

But Lydia herself could no longer control the bitterness that had been swelling within her for many weeks.

"You'd rather live by yourself in London, in fact, and cope with difficulties of which you haven't the slightest idea, whilst I stay alone down here, than let us be together during these miserable times of anxiety—naturally with the understanding that I shouldn't dream of being there when there's the slightest chance of your having Roland at home. Is that it?"

"Oh, mama!"

"But isn't that what you mean to tell me?"

"Oh, don't!" said Jennie miserably.

"Don't go on making exclamations that mean nothing. What you're really saying is that you don't want me to have anything to do with your new life, isn't it?"

think it perfectly natu

"The cases are not
and never should sugg
ried life. Those are
succeed, from anyone's
perfectly well that the
Roland will be away f
and your natural home-
is still here; I am still h
until you can begin you
you say you don't want
prefer to be alone in L
down here."

The expression of J
was speaking had hard
hension of giving pain

The tone of her voice
she spoke.

"It isn't fair to talk
you. I *can't* stay alwa
mama. In fact, even if

coldly. "I was living with an uncle and aunt, and expense was a very serious consideration to them. You know very well that everything I have in the world is yours, and that my only wish has been to take care of you and keep you good and well and happy."

"Then," said Jennie swiftly, "you ought to be glad for me to do what I like, and—and what Roland and I both think is best for me. I've got to develop into a responsible grown-up person *some* time or other, I suppose—and how can I ever do it when all the time you're shielding me from everything, and only wanting me to be, as you say, good and happy—like a little baby?"

The irrepressible gibe sprung to Lydia's lips:

"That's what Roland Valentine has taught you to think!"

Jennie looked straight at her mother.

"He's given me the courage to say it," she retorted in a voice as hard as Lydia's own, "but I've been thinking it, and feeling it, for years and years. And I've been miserable at home."

The unforgettable words that could never be unsaid had been spoken between them.

In a flash of unutterable misery Lydia knew that it was too late for the self-control, the pity, the abnegation, that might have saved the final, open contest that never now could be as though it had not been.

As though a veritable physical abyss yawned between them, the mother and daughter stared at one another aghast, with wretched, incredulous unhappiness.

The lines of Jennie's young face broke first, and she burst into pitiful, tempestuous sobbing and crying.

"Mama, mama, forgive me—I didn't mean it. Oh, don't look like that! I was wicked and ungrateful—I didn't mean it—I'll do anything you like——"



XXIX

"WHAT have you been doing to Jennie?" asked Joyce Damerel next morning, in her manner that so oddly mingled disagreeableness with a sort of friendly interest.

Lydia was not in the least surprised by the question. Her own wakeful and wretched night had left no such traces as were plainly to be seen in the unaccustomed rings round Jennie's eyes, and the heavy, swollen look of young eyelids unused to tears and to vigils alike.

"Jennie must have been crying almost all night."

"She got overtired in London," Lydia said unemotionally. "She was thoroughly upset last night."

"Poor little thing!"

Joyce sought for no further explanation, it was evident.

But Lydia knew, quite as well as though she had been within earshot of the lovers, what had been Roland Valentine's first startled inquiry when he and Jennie met outside the church porch.

And after the two had walked across the fields together to Quintmere, whither Lady Lucy drove Lydia, she was aware of a new hostility in Roland Valentine's manner to herself.

The words of the night before, Lydia told herself with a strange apathy, were destined to echo long and far. She wondered dully how they had come to speak them—why she, with her lifelong instincts of self-control, had madly, at this eleventh hour, brought about

...ically.

It seemed to her that
passionately once or tw

"This is a trying tin
old lady kindly, when
together in the drawing-
think of dear little Jen
the Infinite Mercy will
at the end of this cruel w

Lydia smiled faintly,
tudes that were the mea
to Lady Lucy's spirit of

She thought that the
wretchedness could neve
mother-in-law.

Without being aware
reached those last outpos
anguish must have the re
the abyss of madness.

Because she could bea
commonplaces no longer,
intention of walking hom

to become engaged to Jennie. The Kennedys had been thinking only of the war then, and of their own two boys. They had cared little enough for Jennie's romance, less still for Lydia's state of mind on the subject.

But the Rector had looked at her.

Lydia remembered the look with odd distinctness, and the impression of an understanding almost apprehensive in its completeness, that it had produced upon her.

She had hardly seen the Rector since that day. Had he, perhaps, understood?

"I should like to see Mr. Palmer and Nathalie," she murmured mechanically.

"Oh, yes, and, besides, you must drive back. The pony and cart are ordered for five o'clock, as I thought you would want Jennie to be early. Poor little girl, she looks pale and tired to-day, but I'm sure that's very natural. Even in ordinary times a girl is apt to look worn out with all the excitement and the preparations just before the wedding. . . ."

Lady Lucy talked on, and Lydia stared out of the window.

It was a bleak, windy day, with scudding clouds flying across a dark sky. Perhaps they would say it was too cold for the Rector to be out of doors, and Nathalie and her husband would come alone.

If so, Lydia felt that her last hope would have failed her.

She looked at the clock.

It was not yet quite three, and they would probably not arrive before four o'clock.

Waiting had become unendurable.

"Where is Joyce?" she asked, wondering if it could be borne, were she obliged to sit *tête-à-tête* for another

put by the fire in the
some stuff for his poc
but Joyce to put it on.

The placid old voice
to Lydia ages and age
look at the clock.

It must have stopped
The hands did not

"That clock is fast, r
isn't more than a quart
new man who comes up
now doesn't seem to un
way that young Davy d
actually at the front n
postcard last week. E
'I am quite well.' You'
field postcards, I suppos

The sound of Colon
two-seater was heard ou
noon—long before four c
to Lydia that she had live

while the sounds of arrival in the hall outside penetrated to the drawing-room.

"How nice and early they are!" said Lady Lucy. "Will you ring the bell, my dear? Nathalie will be glad of some tea, after that cold drive. I'm sure her father won't have ventured out of doors in such an east wind."

Lydia cast upon her a look of affrighted anguish.

What did her mother-in-law mean by so calm a prophecy of a disaster that now presented itself to Lydia's disordered perceptions as one of almost incredible magnitude?

The door opened and Nathalie came into the room with Joyce Damerel. Colonel Kennedy, alone, followed them, and the door shut behind him.

The Rector had not come.

"Father was disappointed, but we didn't dare to risk it—the wind has gone right round to the east. He wanted so much to see Jennie, too, Lydia—but he wouldn't run the chance of catching cold before the wedding. My dear, the church looks lovely—they've decorated it all. Where's Jennie?"

"They're both in the library," said Lady Lucy with a significant smile.

"Oh, well, we shall see them presently. I suppose all the preparations are finished, Lydia? You look very tired. Was there a great deal to do?"

"Quite a lot," said Lydia, and smiled faintly.

They went on talking all round her.

Colonel Kennedy spoke about the war news, and the others listened to him anxiously, with the deference accorded to the opinion of an old soldier. News of Billy Damerel and of Aleck and Charlie Kennedy was exchanged between Joyce and Nathalie. Old Lady

and yours, Nathalie?"

"Not at all easy to

so at having to drink

to arrange a special s

Monsieur Mertens can

it was such bad coffee

He said she was *éner*

couldn't find anything

"That's just it! On

from Antwerp—says h

going to die, but he *seen*

"I suppose," said Col

have the worst specime

—the men, at all events

Lydia heard it all with

similar conversations ha

elsewhere since the war.

Tea was brought, and

came in together, and th

the wedding. It seemed

one was anxious not to

of anything connected wi

ford—it's in the library. Grandmama is letting me have everything sent here."

"I can pack it all up myself and send it anywhere you like afterwards," said Lydia, almost from force of habit.

She saw herself toiling over the wearisome task when Jennie had left her, gone away to her new life.

"We can all help," said Joyce Damerel briskly. "Or perhaps Jennie would like her things to stay here until she comes to fetch them herself."

With the faintest possible start, Lydia realized the intention, hostile to herself, of the little speech.

Joyce had never liked her.

"I think we ought to start," she said suddenly. "Nathalie, will your father be in if I go round that way?"

Nathalie looked rather surprised.

"Oh, yes. Shall I take a message, Lydia, if it's anything about to-morrow?"

Lydia heard herself utter a disagreeable laugh.

"No, it's nothing to do with Jennie or with Jennie's concerns. *I* want to speak to the Rector."

She could not herself have told when the wish had crystallized into a determination.

"Will you ring, Roland, if you please," said Lady Lucy quietly, "and order the pony-cart to be brought to the door?"

When they left Quintmere, the old lady solemnly kissed and blessed her granddaughter, and Joyce, most undemonstrative of women, put her arms round the girl for a moment.

Nathalie, her soft blue eyes full of ready, emotional tears, let them fall unabashed, as she said, smiling:

"Till to-morrow, Jennie darling!"

—, I do," Lydia re
in her voice that she he
It was as though an
would rouse in her a ve
no attempt to question it
They drove almost in
"I'll wait outside witl
in?" Jennie asked rather
"Wait? No. Don't v
leave the pony at the in
quick as you can. I'll wa
"Oh, mama!"
"What's the matter?"
"Won't you be tired?"
"No," said Lydia inflex
She always disliked any
anxiety on her behalf from
to minimize her own self-
assert on Jennie's part an
"Then please come bac
last evening—at least, th
Jennie pleaded confusedly.



the wheels recede, Lydia became aware that a violent rush of uncontrollable tears suddenly threatened her.

"Is the Rector in, Alice?" she asked the maid, and heard with horror the quivering of her own voice.

The Rector was in the study.

Lydia had only to cross the hall and open the familiar door, but before she entered the little lamp-lit room her face was drenched with tears.

She pulled down her veil in desperation.

"Lydia!" said the old Rector in pleased surprise.

Then his face altered pitifully. "What—who is it?" he stammered. "Not Nathalie—not one of the boys?"

"No—no. Only myself. It's nothing—I mean nothing has happened, only I can't bear things any longer—I thought perhaps you'd understand—I had to speak to someone——"

The sound of her own incoherence, by its very unfamiliarity, served to destroy Lydia's last defences.

She sank into a chair and wept wildly and bitterly as she had never in all her life wept before.

The Rector stood still for a moment and looked at her, then walked slowly, with the careful gait of age and obesity, to the door.

"Alice!" Lydia heard him call.

"Alice! I am engaged with Mrs. Damerel and do not wish to be disturbed. Please tell Colonel and Mrs. Kennedy when they come in. Thank you, Alice."

He closed the door, and came slowly and carefully back again to his seat in front of the writing-table.

His attitude was one familiar to Lydia, and, indeed, to all those who knew him: one knee crossed over the other, his hands lightly joined together, his chair turned sideways to the light that fell from the little reading-

blame for both failings
for letting him remain
virtually become hers

He had spoilt Jennie
they came home from
of judgment had of
Clement in the parish

Lydia, in common w
of him: "The Rector
this world." She had c
unpractical, behind the
and conscientious to be

She had never sough
was not in her nature to
and although she would
out analyzing wherein th
of the customary religio
been brought up, it had
her, and would not occ
supposed to be "religion"
as she was at present pas



whose halting, ineloquent sermons she knew almost as well as he did himself.

She had come merely because the breaking-point had been reached, there was no one to understand, and her wild, forlorn, last hope centred on this old man from whom she had never heard a word of condemnation of anyone.



poor little poor,

"I'm so miserable!" child.

"Yes—yes. Is it ab

She answered brok hemence, the accumulat finding vent in disconne cal phrases.

She scarcely knew wh

Jennie was going aw who hated her mother, teaching Jennie to think tyrannized over. Rolan that Lydia had made Jer

Joyce had been cruel, not knowing what love r Clement, and done her b

"No, no, my poor chi

"She said I wanted th that I would only let Jen —that I grudged her th

Lydia broke off and

to want to protect them—to save them from pain—to bear it instead. I *have* loved Jennie, God knows—I do love her. My care for her, and over-anxiety, and perhaps over-solicitude, have all been love."

"Love," said the Rector in the same dreamy, monotonous voice, as of one voicing a conviction too intimate for vehement upholding, "Love is suffering. Whether it is love for man, or woman or child—for husband or wife, little child or dear friend, always remember that, Lydia. Love is suffering in this life. It is only afterwards, when we have mastered that truth, and accepted all that it implies, that no doubt there is some further stage, undreamed of by poor humanity, when the suffering is all transmuted, and love becomes joy."

Slowly a dim understanding of the words seemed to come to Lydia.

Oddly, and not irrelevantly, she remembered once more the pronouncement of the little girl who had worked with her in a London shop twenty years earlier.

"You've never cared for anyone—when you do love somebody . . . you won't know how to set about it. . . ."

Was she learning now—for the first time?

No longer wrenched by the hard sobs of her despair, she continued to gaze at the old, unlearned man, so much less well equipped for life than she had seemed to herself to be.

"Do you know, my dear," said the Rector in a tone of gentle narrative, "what always strikes me as the most sublime illustration of the true love that is suffering? One has seen it reproduced in Roman Catholic churches, although I do not know if they give it any special significance. It is generally only one of many little pictures placed round the church, and it represents

hoped might throw a
and tortured her, but
great Figure of Christ
real relation to the prob

"It isn't religion I
believe in it all, of cou
me now in this."

"Lydia, my dear chil
that seemed to hold a l
am not in the pulpit.
nor at this moment am I
tions of religion. Later
yourself, perhaps. I am
Divine Lord, but at th
human Mother. Think
mythology, if you will—
great tragedy of which
yourself if there could ha
out such love—such love

He looked at her fixedly
on speaking very slowly, a
form to herself some mea



whom she had lain in the tiny, poor little manger at Bethlehem, whom she had carried before her on the back of the ass during the flight into Egypt, safe in her arms. During the three years of His ministry no doubt they were much separated," said the Rector in the same simple, narrative manner, "but there must have been many times when He came back to her—for instance, they were together for the festival at the marriage of Cana. She knew about His work, and I feel sure that they talked about it all together.

"Think, my dear, what it must have been to a mother to meet her son like that. On His way to be tortured and put to death like a malefactor, the blood and the sweat all streaming down His face, and carrying on His shoulders that heavy Cross. She must have felt then that it would be a million times easier to suffer it all herself, don't you think? It would have hurt her far less, surely.

"And she went up the hill, too, my dear, and stood by the Cross and saw it all. And I have always thought to myself—I trust there is nothing irreverent in the idea—that her suffering must have surpassed Christ's. One knows very well," said the old Rector, "that it is less painful to endure bodily anguish than to watch it endured by one's beloved."

Lydia uttered a stifled, startled cry.

"But that *is* love, to find it easier to endure oneself than to let one's beloved endure!"

"It is a stage of love," the Rector acquiesced gently.

"And beyond that?" asked Lydia fearfully.

"Beyond that there is a greater immolation. That of relinquishing the privilege of suffering to another, and accepting the pain of watching that suffering."

Jennie, with her i
ness, that held all th
young, blind thing st
—Roland Valentine,
ment on behalf of hi
standards of indepen
narrow, inflexible ju
onistic to Lydia's; ol
tional shibboleths of h
yet stood for selflessne
with her simple, matt
evidently accepted by
has to live her own
yourself that I meant-
like."

They had all meant
advised Aunt Evelyn,
pendence of her middl
escing in it with the r
make the best of our s

"That is all, my dear," said the Rector gently.

Lydia had heard nothing of what he had been saying, although she had been aware of the kindly, monotonous old voice, talking on and on in careful, halting sentences.

Her every faculty had been absorbed in the tardy revelation that was at length hers.

As her mental equilibrium slowly swung back to its habitual poise once more, the fundamentally practical outlook that would always be Lydia's, asserted itself.

"But it's too late now. Jennie is going away from me to-morrow."

"To-morrow," repeated the Rector almost maunderingly.

Voices became audible in the hall outside, and Lydia knew that the Kennedys had returned.

She could even conjecture, from the murmur of the maid Alice's voice that the Rector's message had been given to them.

The sounds dispersed and ceased altogether.

"I must go," said Lydia. "You've been so good to me—I was nearly mad when I came, I think. I can be braver now—I can be brave to-morrow."

"To-morrow," said the Rector again. "Let to-morrow be Jennie's day."

Some glimmering of his meaning brought a flash of irrepressible resentment into the inquiry of Lydia's gaze.

"My dear child—my dear Lydia," said the old man apologetically, "let little Jennie have the foreground to-morrow. Let hers be the bravery, and the sacrifice, and the sorrow, and the gladness. It need matter to no one what anybody else feels, or has to undergo—it need

Very tentatively,
than by full awarene
her the infinitely su
hers.

To-morrow—her v
After all, Lydia refle
mind that sometimes
exhaustion induced b
tion, those to-morrow
linked with Jennie's n
future was to hold c
could doubt—it might
to encounter her expe

Let to-morrow be J
life had yet been hers.

And again, another e
by a more cynical, less
Rector, brought a shad
Lydia's lips as she walk

Grandpapa, who knew
snatcher."

Miss Jennie's been in quite a way—it's past dinner-time, and knowing you were walking——"

"I was detained at Mrs. Kennedy's," said Lydia briefly.

Jennie ran out of the drawing-room.

"Oh, mama! I'm glad you've come—I was getting so worried, thinking of you out in the cold. . . ."

Jennie stopped nervously, and Lydia knew intuitively that she was remembering her mother's old, implied claim to the sole prerogative for all such expressions of concern.

"I stayed longer than I meant to with the Rector. He sent you his love."

"Did he? Shall we have dinner now, mama, or are you going to change?"

"I'll change," said Lydia, and went slowly upstairs.

She carefully removed the traces of weeping from her face before she came down again.

The short evening was a very quiet one. In the drawing-room Jennie sat with her cheek resting upon her hand, gazing into the fire. Once she said rather timidly:

"The packing is all finished. Susan and I put the things into my new dressing-bag when I came in this afternoon."

"It's a beautiful bag," said Lydia absently.

The dressing-bag had been Roland Valentine's gift.

She remembered that she herself had been secretly disappointed, at the time of her marriage, because no one had given her such a thing, and she possessed only the plain, wooden hair brushes and clothes brush, and the celluloid comb, that had figured upon her makeshift dressing-table at Miss Nettleship's boarding-house. And then Uncle George had given her a cheque, pri-

word "trousseau" l
so as to include the
dressing-bags. The
found and purchase

She generally had
sionately. "There's
another of Grandpap
for many years of he
axiom in her own pe
and admire her, she
tional advantages, she
achieved it, had extr
blemished from vari
a marriage such as n
able to Lydia Raymc
shop, and, even grea
filled the place open
record was to end th

Lydia felt as utterl
of her life, the com
deply to have

church, the extent to which choir and organist would do credit to the parish.

"I do want it all to be perfect," was Jennie's candid aspiration.

"I hope it will be," said Lydia tonelessly. "Are you very happy, Jennie?"

"Yes," said Jennie simply, her grey eyes ecstatic.

Then she looked at her mother, and added wistfully:

"I should be perfectly happy if—if only you were, too."

Lydia smiled faintly.

She thought that she could appraise at its true value Jennie's obvious afterthought.

Her fatigue was almost overwhelming, and, to her own surprise, she slept heavily all through the night.

Then it was Jennie's wedding-day—a clear, grey day, without sunshine and without wind.

Surprisingly enough, Lydia felt, one went through it with very little feeling of any kind. The emotion that struck most sharply at her consciousness was one of surprise that so long a waiting, so many preparations, should have culminated only in so brief an apotheosis.

The wedding was over before she had adjusted herself to the expected pang of it, and actually very little impression of it all remained with her.

The odd epithet that had rung in her ears since the day before rang there still, meaningless, and yet strangely expressive.

"Situation-snatcher."

It even mingled senselessly in the farewells that rang all round her, when Jennie—Jennie Valentine—took her leave of them all with her husband.

you've only just time
Colonel Kennedy,
"train-fever."
"Oh!"
The bride flung her
"It's only for a we
solingly. "Thank yo
wedding——"
The chauffeur start
motor-car, and its thr
caused Jennie to detac
But she still faced Lydi
her eyes tearful, but, l
unconquerable joyousne
"I *must* say something
dully astonished at her
words at all.
A situation-snatcher.
was an obsession; she ha
She bent forward and
"Good-bye, my child.
The chauff



A sense of wrenching open, as of vistas of finality, suddenly dispersed Lydia's apathy, and, at the agonizing glimpse of her own bereft and isolated future, she found, as the car began to move slowly from the door, the habitual, instinctive self-expression that alone could drug her misery.

"Good-bye, Jennie! I'll see to everything—don't worry about letters or packing—I'll do it all for you whilst you're away."

"Jennie is still waving!" cried Joyce Damerel, and waved back again vigorously.

But at the same instant Lady Lucy laid her tremulous old hand upon Lydia's, gazing at her compassionately, and Nathalie Kennedy exclaimed aloud, turning towards her:

"Oh, poor Lydia!"

The scattered groups of relatives and friends coalesced, surrounding her.

